

## **DFMC Endorsement Committee Questionnaire**

### **Isabel Piedmont-Smith for City Council District 5**

Democracy for Monroe County is a grassroots political action committee dedicated to supporting progressive policies at the local and state levels, as well as candidates who support those policies. DFMC is part of a nationwide coalition of grassroots groups allied with Democracy for America.

#### **DFMC General Questions**

1. Why are you running for office or re-election, and what do you hope to accomplish as \_\_\_\_\_?  
If you are running for reelection, please include your accomplishments in the prior term.

I am running for re-election to City Council to represent District 5 because I love my home town and want to see it thrive in an uncertain future where climate change will bring about widespread change. I think increasing the sustainability of Bloomington's economy, environment, and society are key to Bloomington's well-being in the decades ahead. Specifically, I hope to accomplish a reuse of the current hospital site that blends into the historic character of the surrounding neighborhoods, includes a significant portion of affordable housing, some mixed use (commercial/retail), and a community center with programming for older adults.

My previous accomplishments on the City Council include co-authorship of three important city ordinances: the green building ordinance, the urban chicken ordinance (expanding the ability to have flocks), and the 2018 ordinance which gives City Council and the public additional oversight of expenditures of \$100K or more in city funds that were not clearly delineated in the budget. I also authored dozens of amendments to the 2018 Comprehensive Plan which will guide further development in Bloomington. My amendments focused on greenhouse gas reduction through transportation changes, respect for the built environment in current core neighborhoods, and suggesting where student housing should and should not be located.

2. What are the top three issues your district, or your office, faces and how do you plan to address these issues? What educational or experiential resources do you use to further your understanding of these issues?
  - a) The hospital site redevelopment – see above. I am on the steering committee convened to guide the process.
  - b) Redevelopment around Switchyard Park. The park is set to open this November, and it will greatly increase property values around it. This is good in that the private sector will invest in improvements along S. Walnut St., which is a blighted corridor. But it will also increase housing prices in the southern part of McDoel Gardens Neighborhood (in District 5) and in Broadview (District 1), which are currently some of the most affordable homes in the city. So the city must try to preserve the number of affordable units in this area. The city is well-positioned to bring in CDFI funds for this purpose, and the new Unified Development Ordinance will also provide incentives to include affordable housing.
  - c) Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing local resilience in the face of global climate change. This issue is, of course, not specific to District 5, but I feel so strongly about it I will mention it here. The IPCC last October said we must reduce emissions by 45% by 2030 and get to zero emissions by 2050, or else face major catastrophic impacts on human life on this planet. Every city, town, and hamlet must do its part, Bloomington included. As a member of the Board of the Monroe County Solid Waste Management District, I am working toward a county-wide composting program. On City Council, I have drafted amendments to

be introduced to the Transportation Plan that put the focus more clearly on getting people out of single-occupancy vehicles. I support the mayor's efforts to strengthen our local food network. Even on the hospital site, I will advocate for small, local developers to be able to build there rather than relying on large developers from outside our community.

With all issues, I conduct research online, obtaining references from local experts. I also find my constituents have a lot of relevant knowledge, so I listen to them at my monthly meetings and one-on-one. Having served on the City Council a previous full term (2008-12) and again since January 2016, I also know which offices within city government to contact to find out relevant information before making decisions. (Sometimes the packets prepared for Council meetings are inadequate.)

3. Please list your political experience both here and elsewhere, including your history of grassroots activism and/or other examples of civic participation and commitments.

I have been politically active since the 1988 election, when I helped with get out the vote efforts for the Dukakis presidential campaign in Lorain, Ohio (near my college). In 2001, I was a founding member of the Monroe County Green Party and was the campaign manager for Julie Roberts when she ran for County Council as a Green Party candidate.

From 2003-06 I served on the board of the South Central Community Action Program here in Bloomington. In 2004, I was appointed by the mayor to the Bloomington Environmental Commission and served as chair in 2006. By fall 2006, I was back in the fold of the Democratic Party and campaigned for Teresa Harper for judge. I have actively campaigned for several local Democratic candidates since then.

I have been a professional staff member at IU-Bloomington since 1998, and I served on the Professional Staff Council there in 2002-07 (president, 2005-06). I also served on the Anti-Sweatshop Advisory Committee at IU 2003-06.

Perhaps most important in the context of this questionnaire, I have been a member of Democracy for Monroe County since 2007.

4. In what ways do you consider yourself to be socially, politically, and economically progressive? Twenty progressives in a room will each have a different definition of "progressive." When I use the term, I mean someone who:
- Is not afraid to try new ways to solve problems.
  - Pursues social justice so that all members of society can participate fully without being held back by discrimination, be it based on race, drug use, homeless circumstance, or other factors.
  - Resists the domination of corporations over our economic, social, and political lives while recognizing the importance of labor unions as a balance to corporate power.
  - Thinks government is more often the solution than the problem, if decisions are made democratically and wisely.
  - Supports locally-controlled public education for each and every child, funded by our tax dollars.
  - Fights for human rights, including the right of women to choose abortion, the right of homosexual couples to marry, the right of transgender individuals to live as they want, etc.
  - Believes in science, including the fact of global climate change caused by human activity, which we must curb as quickly as possible.
  - Thinks that growth is not necessarily good, and that the earth cannot support unlimited growth.

These characteristics describe me, they have shaped my decisions while on the City Council, and they will shape my decisions if I am elected again.

5. What are the guiding principles of your political philosophy, and how have these principles informed your past political activity? How will they inform your decisions and actions as \_\_\_\_\_?

I think the response I gave to question 4 is a list of my guiding principles. Some examples of how these principles have led to my decisions as a City Council member include the following:

- a) Scientific data showed that deer were destroying the understory of the woods around Griffy Lake, so I voted in favor of a controlled deer hunt in this area.
- b) As the Council's representative on the Plan Commission and also as a Council member, I required developers to show substantial public benefit in return for approval of a rezone or a Planned Unit Development, and voted NO if such public benefit was not shown, as was the case for the Century Village project and the Arlington St./W. 17<sup>th</sup> St. project.
- c) I was the lead sponsor of the resolution passed by the City Council in Spring 2016 stating that Bloomington welcomes refugees from all countries and condemning then-governor Mike Pence's refusal to support the settlement of refugees in Indiana.
- d) Along with other Council members, I negotiated a two-year plan with the mayor to bring the wages of all seasonal employees of the city up to at least the living wage, as determined by the City's living wage ordinance.

This year, I will continue to push for measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions locally, as we discuss parking garages and the Transportation Plan. I will also support language in the new Unified Development Ordinance that clearly allows opioid rehabilitation homes and treatment centers a place on our community.

6. Describe your ideas & plans for engaging community members through more informed, active, and inclusive participation in the community and in our government.

I hold monthly constituent meetings and have done so since the beginning of my first term in office. I will continue to do so if re-elected. I will also continue to attend neighborhood association meetings and community events, and to keep my Facebook page active (as I have done during this term) to inform voters of upcoming issues and solicit feedback.

### **2019 Primary Issues**

7. Given that Indiana is a "Strong Mayor" state, what actions will you take as a City Council member to ensure that the Mayor's Office is transparent and has proper oversight as well as accountability to the residents of Bloomington? If elected or re-elected as a council person, will you call out improper procedures, attempt to reign in spending, and advocate for transparency from the mayor's office?

As a City Council member I have never rubber-stamped proposals coming from the mayor's administration, always asked probing questions, and never assumed the mayor's way was the only way to address an issue. Council Member Dorothy Granger and I co-authored legislation last year that requires the mayor's administration to bring to the City Council through a public process any proposed expenditures of \$100,000 or more that were not previously approved by the Council in a public process. This legislation came about as a result of the Bearcat armored vehicle purchase by the Bloomington Police Department earlier in the year, which did not go through any public process before the vehicle was ordered.

8. Given the saturation of the luxury student housing market in Bloomington, what are your long term plans to ensure that this trend doesn't become a liability in Bloomington's future? How do we achieve

development without displacement, and how do we ensure there are downtown spaces affordable for non-student residents?

I think the trend of expensive student apartment buildings dominating the housing market is already a problem for Bloomington. In the current banking and tax write-off system, dominated by developers who seek to make maximum profit, the decision of land owners to build luxury student apartments is not surprising. The amount of red tape involved in obtaining subsidies to be able to build affordable housing is so cumbersome I'm surprised any affordable housing is built at all. In the near future there are two hopeful paths to create housing that people earning 60 to 120% AMI could afford:

- a) Development of the current hospital site, which the city will soon own and thus could let affordable housing developers lease for little or no money. I am on the hospital site redevelopment steering committee and will push for a significant percentage of affordable housing on the site.
  - b) Adoption of a Unified Development Ordinance that has strong incentives for affordable housing. The draft UDO released a few weeks ago includes some good incentives, but I will talk to people who actually develop affordable housing to get their input, and perhaps suggest revisions to the UDO.
9. What is your approach to city budget preparation and administration? How will you ensure that decision making about the budget is fair and decentralized? How will you enact a progressive agenda while allocating limited resources?

This is a difficult question because City Council members do not have the amount of time nor the number of staff necessary to guide the city's budget process. It's really the mayor and controller who guide this process, with each department head requesting a certain amount of funds for each program under their purview. I look at each program, compare it with other programs the city funds, and decide whether the proportion of funds going to that program makes sense. The city must provide basic services such as maintenance of roads and multiuse paths, sanitation, police and fire protection, but it also needs to maintain and enhance what makes Bloomington special and inclusive: the arts, parks, rental housing inspections, community celebrations, educational events, and other programs.

As for public participation and transparency, I communicate major budget changes from year to year with constituents at my monthly meeting in August as well as on my Facebook page, gathering feedback as I go. The input from constituents has often led me to ask important follow-up questions of the administration to make sure the city practices what it preaches in regard to sustainability. In my current term, I have pushed for and attained an increase in wages for the city's seasonal employees, so that by 2020 they will all be making, at minimum, what the city defines as a living wage (currently about \$13/hour). This was done in collaboration with other council members.

10. Are you in favor of the proposed economic stimulus programs called the "Green New Deal" (see note)? If so, please describe what steps will you take as a City Council person to lead Bloomington toward it the local level. If not, please describe why and what steps you will take to confront climate change instead.

I support all the principles of the Green New Deal, but I have not heard a realistic plan of how to fund it. On a local level, we should do the following to implement the goals of the Green New Deal:

- **JOBS:** Support locally-owned businesses and businesses that advance sustainability through the staff help from the city's Department of Economic and Sustainable Development, low-interest loans, and marketing support. Follow-through on the commitment to pay all city seasonal employees a living wage and all city regular employees at least \$15/hour.
- **HOUSING:** Provide incentives for the development of affordable housing

- **CLEAN WATER:** Continue advocacy for the protection of the Lake Monroe Watershed from pollution and sediment. Continue monthly testing and tweaking, as necessary, water treatment procedures at the City of Bloomington Utilities water treatment plant.
- **RENEWABLE ENERGY:** Continue to facilitate bulk buying and installation of solar panels for homes, schools, churches, and businesses. Investigate anaerobic digestion of biomass at the city's wastewater treatment plants and conversion of the result into fuel for use in city vehicles (this was the mayor's suggestion at the State of the City address 2019).
- **BUILDINGS:** Strengthen the city's green building ordinance to require all city-owned buildings to be brought up to LEED-Silver or equivalent certification level. Provide stronger incentives for green building in the new Unified Development Ordinance.
- **TRANSPORTATION:** Invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and public transit and prioritize these modes over single-occupancy vehicle use.

**The DFMC Pledge:**

- Will you pledge to not accept donations from corporations, businesses, and people whose activities are overseen by your office? Please explain why or why not.  
Yes, because it is the ethical thing to do.
- Will you pledge to build a strong progressive community and a broad prosperity that supports a living wage for all in Bloomington and Monroe County? Please explain why or why not.  
City government cannot dictate a higher minimum wage for employers in Bloomington than the federal minimum wage, but I certainly support the principle. All labor is valuable, and all who work deserve to earn enough to support themselves.
- Will you pledge to lead effective government, collaborate with our university and community schools for a free, secular, and public education in Bloomington and Monroe County? Please explain why or why not.  
I was a strong supporter of both referenda to maintain funding levels for MCCSC schools after the state government slashed public school budgets about 10 years ago. Public education is the bedrock of democracy. We must have strong public schools so we have an informed population that can make good choices at the ballot box. Religion has no place in schools, and religious colleges should not be allowed to sponsor charter schools. I am opposed to vouchers given to families to use at non-public schools. Children are best served in schools that represent the diversity of the society in which the children will have to function as adults. The City Council can support public education through resolutions in support of funding and through serving as a public platform to discuss public education. As you know, the City does not actually fund public schools.
- Will you support the national effort for universal health care here in Bloomington and Monroe County, including organizations and government agencies committed to expanding access for all? Please explain why or why not.  
Yes, I support Medicare for All. Healthcare is a right, not a privilege reserved for the lucky few who have insurance through their employers. The added protections and coverage of Obamacare must be protected and expanded upon.
- Will you support finding and empowering socially and economically progressive candidates for municipal boards and commissions among ordinary citizens? Please explain why or why not.  
Yes. As a City Council member, I am on the interview committee for several of our resident boards and commissions, and I always aim to appoint progressive people with new perspectives and to increase the diversity of each board so that they truly represent

Bloomington. I encourage individuals to apply for positions on city boards and commissions and suggest which ones would best make use of their experience, interest, and expertise.