

2017 League of Women Voters/Bike BloNo Bloomington Candidate Questionnaire - J. Balmer (candidate for Ward 3)

1. U.S. Census figures show that more than 10,000 of Bloomington-Normal's 97,000 workers 16 years or older did not use a car as their primary mode of transportation to work from 2011 to 2015. Which of the following methods have you or a member of your immediate family regularly used in the last six months to get to work or school? *(select all that apply)*

Car, truck, or van	I do	Family member does
Public transportation	I do	Family member does
Taxicab	I do	Family member does
Motorcycle	I do	Family member does
Bicycle	I do	Family member does
Walked	I do	Family member does
Other means	I do	Family member does
Worked at home	I do	Family member does

Comments: My girlfriend retired from State Farm in 2015 & I work out of an office in my house, so neither one of us commutes to work on a regular basis. We own a car that gets close to 40 mpg & a SUV that hauls the music equipment for my band. We walk on a regular basis, including around the Downtown & Uptown areas after we arrive there, I own a bike & my girlfriend has expressed an interest in doing the same.

2. Both Bloomington and Normal voted in 2016 to adopt Complete Streets policies. These policies instruct engineering staff to consider all modes of transportation (i.e., ensuring that pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users of all ages and abilities feel safe and comfortable using the facility) when reconstructing or resurfacing streets. Would you have voted/did you vote to adopt a Complete Streets policy?

- Yes
 No

Comments: I have supported this effort and will continue to do so. I have spoken to staff in Bloomington & publicly on numerous occasions, including Planning Commission meetings, about the need to assure all communities w/in the City have the same multi-mode access. I was very vocal about making changes to the Main Street corridor in Bloomington to allow for pedestrian & bicycle access to Downtown.

3. Both Bloomington and Normal voted in 2016 to send a portion of revenue from a 1-percentage point increase in the sales tax to Connect Transit. From both communities that new funding totals \$1 million, which allowed Connect Transit to begin offering service on Sundays. In FY 2016, Connect Transit provided more than 2.5 million rides to passengers and about 75,000 rides on paratransit service for people with special needs. Would you have voted/did you vote to fund Connect Transit?

Yes

No

Comments: I have and will continue to support funding of Connect Transit. I do believe that changes can be made to make the entire operation more efficient & reduce the amount of subsidization required to provide this access to the community.

4. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, in a report cited by the 2016 McLean County Community Health Needs Assessment, found that “Among other issues, use of cars contributes to low levels of physical activity in the US. In the last several decades car-reliance has increased. The percent of US workers driving to work rose from 64 to 88 percent from 1960 to 2000, while the share walking to work declined.”

The report went on: “There is an increasing recognition of the need to focus on environmental factors—including the ‘built environment’—that may help promote activity. The ‘built environment’ describes physical or man-made features such as sidewalks, bicycle trails, streetlights, traffic, safety from crime and parks that may promote or discourage activity.”

In our community - and many others across the United States - the built environment took a dramatic shift starting in the 1960s away from compact, walkable, bikeable communities in favor of suburban sprawl. Do you think revitalizing our urban cores - specifically Downtown Bloomington and Uptown Normal - can help provide citizens with an option to live, work, and play in communities that enable healthy active transportation and recreation?

Yes

No

Comments: I have been directly involved w/ the revitalization of Downtown for most of the 24 years I've lived in Bloomington & have supported many of the initiatives in Uptown Normal.

5. In addition to the impact of the built environment on public health, sprawl tends to cost municipalities more than compact development; each additional foot of roadway, sewer, water main, and other infrastructure to serve large properties costs the municipality more, typically without an increase in tax revenue large enough to account for that increase in infrastructure costs. Large properties also mean it takes longer to walk or bike places, leading more people to choose other modes more often. Do you think it's important, all else being equal, to promote investment in our urban cores instead of encouraging more suburban sprawl?

Yes

No

Comments: I was appointed to the Bloomington Planning Commission primarily to work on the rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan. I worked w/ City staff, the rest of the Planning Commission and both the County & Regional Planning Commissions to assure that infill would be the first choice for new development, that the streets, sidewalks and bike path plans would be included, that Downtown revitalization would continue to be a focus and that we avoid annexing sub-divisions built in the middle of nowhere w/ no thought to provisioning basic services, including transportation.

6. Bloomington's Public Works Department created an award-winning Sidewalk Master Plan, which was adopted by the City Council in October 2015. The plan outlines a few key investments to dramatically improve the walkability of the community, such as:

- \$7.4 million to make the entire network compliant with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act
- \$4.1 million to bring the most dangerous sidewalks up to a minimum pavement quality
- \$261,000 to fill in connectivity gaps in the sidewalk network, which are often very short segments that prevent people from walking at all or - even worse - end up in a collision because they walk in the street.

If elected, would you prioritize making all of these improvements over ten years, as the plan calls for?

Yes

No

Comments: As I wrote previously, the sidewalk, streets & bike path plans were integral parts of the Comprehensive Plan. One of the major reasons I'm running for City Council is to make sure that the Comprehensive Plan is properly implemented.

7. Streets are expensive. Bigger streets are more expensive. Standard engineering doctrine over the last several decades has encouraged engineers to build streets to accommodate “peak hour traffic” - essentially building roads that are big enough to move the most cars that might be seen at the busiest time of day, with almost zero delay. That’s why we’ve seen Towanda Barnes Road balloon from two lanes to five; 95% of the time, a two-lane road in this location would be perfectly sufficient, but engineering doctrine requires that they build it wide enough to eliminate congestion for the busiest few minutes a day - even though it more than doubles the cost.

Not every community does it this way. Policymakers are free to instruct their engineers to allow congestion at certain times of day if it’ll save money. These decisions allow communities to repair more streets with the same amount of money, and they usually end up creating safer, more vibrant communities. The drawback, of course, is that commuters may experience some amount of congestion.

As part of the discussion surrounding Complete Streets, proponents argued that policies promoting sustainable transportation could save the community money in the long run by allowing people the choice to commute by bike, transit, or on foot - reducing the number of cars on the street and the associated congestion.

If elected, would you instruct engineers to focus on eliminating congestion or building safer, smaller, more efficient streets?

- Eliminate congestion with bigger streets
- Allow peak-hour congestion so more streets can be repaired

Comments: Multi-mode transportation is, and will continue to be a requirement as we rebuild existing streets and build new ones.