

# 2017 League of Women Voters/Bike BloNo Bloomington Candidate Questionnaire - Greg Rodriguez (candidate for Ward 9)

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:

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
- Probably.

Comments: I do not object to the Complete Streets policy per se. However, this question is too complex to be afforded only a binary response option.

My greatest concern as a candidate is the shrinking workforce in the Bloomington MSA which will bear the cost of every city infrastructure project. I can absolutely support the addition of a bike lane, for example, if we're widening a street somewhere and the incremental cost is marginal. But if the incremental cost becomes significant, then we'll have to talk about it. Every dollar we spend in one place is a dollar which can't be spent elsewhere. So the question in my mind is not whether we will add that bike lane. Rather, it's "what's more important to you, Bloomington? Adding a bike lane to Main Street or expanding the parking lot at the library?".

I think Complete Streets is a fantastic idea, but city financial resources are not infinite and the growth to which our community has become accustomed over the 90's and 00's is a thing of the past.

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:

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'm troubled by how easily we throw around the term 'revitalization'. I'm a numbers guy and I don't think we've bothered to define precisely what 'revitalization' means. As I look around downtown Bloomington I wonder why anyone thinks it's not already vital? There are relatively few empty storefronts and the street parking is often full. Granted, there are a few troubled properties on which profiteer developers are trying to make a fortune at taxpayer expense. Is that what revitalization really means? 'Revitalization' starts to look to me like corporate charity which ultimately leads to gentrification -- which I believe is a double-edged sword.

Uptown Normal is very nice, and a far cry from the area I hung around as an ISU student in the 80's. While I misspent my share of hours at Rocky's, Shannigan's and The Gallery, Uptown is definitely a nicer place now. However, Uptown is an area of only nine city blocks. Downtown Bloomington is thirty blocks or more, depending on how you define the borders. The scope of any 'revitalization' there is orders of magnitude greater, and frankly, unfeasible unless you assume unrealistic economic growth.

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: As leading questions go this one is the mother lode. I think the highlighted portion of the question is something of a logical leap. I'll concede that extra feet of roads, sewers, etc, cost more. But a home in Hawthorne Hills, for example, will have a significantly higher property tax liability than a home on West Monroe (probably triple, or even more). Plus, the residents of the former home will likely consume much more than residents of the latter, and therefore bear a larger sales tax burden. People who live in those "suburban sprawl" homes are absolutely paying a tax premium for the privilege and it feels like you're glossing over that.

I believe in allowing markets to operate freely, and when consumers begin opting out of a 'sprawling' suburban home and into an urban one, then that's what developers will offer. I think people should be free to choose whatever lifestyle option they want, and the market for homes will adjust to that all on its own.

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: Spending on improving the city's infrastructure is one of my highest priorities, and sidewalks are the one of the most foundational infrastructure components from which everyone benefits.

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: I apologize, but I think this is another leading question with insufficient response options. As I understood when the project was initiated, Towanda-Barnes was widened from two lanes to five not because of the traffic load today, but in an attempt to accommodate a future traffic load based on forecasts of significant growth in that area (T-B was billed as "the next Veteran's Parkway" for years). Also, I think it's overly simplistic to suggest that avoiding congestion is merely a matter of motorist convenience. There is a high correlation between congestion and collisions -- so initiatives to relieve that congestion are also matters of public safety.

In practice the city will have X number of dollars to spend on street work. Those dollars will have to be sensibly apportioned to a number of projects and I don't think it's an all or nothing proposition; those funds won't be spent solely on building rural superhighways or solely on improving interior streets to make it safer for bicyclists. It feels like you're implying this with the question and I feel it's just a little disingenuous to suggest that there is no compromise approach to incrementally meet both objectives.

In particular, I do think the widening of T-B was ill-advised; but mostly because the justification for doing so was based on population growth forecasts which I doubt will materialize in any reasonably near term.