

2017 League of Women Voters/Bike BloNo Normal Candidate Questionnaire - Ron Ulmer (candidate for Town Council)

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: I am retired and have no relatives that live in BN. However, I frequently visit the Uptown area because I do my banking, have a Normal PO Box and enjoy the eateries and shopping. I prefer to spend my money at local mom & pop stores over the chain stores. Weather and time permitting, I walk or ride my bicycle to Uptown and my nearby rental properties.

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: Bicyclists, pedestrians, and mass transportation users need safe transit that is convenient to use to make the decision to use an alternative to driving.

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: At off peak periods I frequently observe buses running empty or with only one rider. Society needs a new paradigm to serve the riders that need transportation to work or medical appointments at these times without running large full size buses emitting pollutants. Some combination of the latest communication technology to signal the need for a ride and a smaller energy efficient van, small bus, or a subsidized Uber or taxi ride needs to substitute for full sized buses running around with one or no riders.

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: Since 2000 major changes in commuting have taken place especially with large numbers of millennials returning to mass transit, walking, bicycling and even skate boarding to work. Having a driver’s license and an automobile for the first time since World War II are not the most desired wants on many high school and college students or recent graduate want list. This dramatic sociological change began with the connected media explosion. Many Millennials prefer to ride on a mode of transportation where they can use their electronic devices to communicate, work, research, study, or use app’s and play games. Other millennials prefer to ride bicycles, skate board, and walk or jog, many times using earbuds. Additionally I know several people who work from home on their computers via a secure connection to their employer’s information technology center. Their employers only require physical presence at work as necessary.

Other than providing trail extensions from dense population areas to employment centers and other popular destinations, I doubt that social planning can have more than minimal impact on healthy active transportation. Ideally, housing is close to work centers, stores, and recreation centers, resulting in short walking or bicycling trips which would have little impact on fitness, although these planned areas would reduce commuting time and air pollution. I strongly recommend more bicycle racks being installed in Uptown at some additional locations and at Chiddix Junior High. Chiddix has one overly crowded bike rack at the North end of the parking lot. I am sure that more bike racks at Chiddix and Uptown would result in more bike riders. A visual survey needs to be taken at all Unit 5 and District 87 schools to ensure that bike rack space is adequate as well as destinations on the ISU and IWU campuses.

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: Yes, it breaks my heart to rapidly "develop" the world's richest farmland so people can have huge homes on a large land tract. I strongly oppose the east side hi-way as it would destroy more highly productive farmland and contribute much to urban sprawl. Widened Towanda Barnes ate up enough rich farmland. Better timed traffic signals and traffic circles can reduce the commute time and pollution created by traffic jams. Whenever gas prices spike, subdivision development in neighboring communities, such as Hudson and Heyworth almost come to a complete halt, use of mass transit, passenger trains and intercity buses rise rather quickly. During times of low gas prices behaviors reverse. The Federal government could reduce automobile usage and urban sprawl by raising Federal Gas tax a few cents per gallon every year for a decade or more, thereby not having the negative economic impact of spikes in gas prices that occur whenever a world event interrupts or slows oil production. Federal gas tax has not been increased in about 20 years. When state and local gas taxes are raised, many drivers purchase gas in neighboring areas. Higher gasoline prices are the most effective way to reduce miles driven.

6. The Town of Normal is considering options to improve the Constitution Trail where it intersects with roadways, such as Vernon, Willow, and Raab. Improvements to favor pedestrians and remind motorists that pedestrians have the right of way could include signage in the middle of the crosswalk, crosswalk LEDs, and signs illuminated with LEDs to remind motorists of the need to stop to provide the pedestrian safe passage. Would you be in favor of such improvements?

Yes

No

Comments: In the early 1970's I lived in Germany. Cross walks all over Europe have the same markings and lighting so that they were universally recognized. All drivers stopped at these crosswalks when occupied by pedestrians as it was a felony to hit a pedestrian in a crosswalk. The State and the entire country need to standardize crosswalk markings, using the international model which drivers from anywhere recognize. Identifying crosswalks differently in Normal differently than Springfield or Chicago or Indianapolis will not do much to improve pedestrian safety or may even lead to confusion and more accidents. Additionally, consistent and rigorous enforcement is needed across all jurisdictions.

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: This question is difficult to answer because it is, “which comes first, the chicken or the egg?” Eliminating congestion reduces air pollution and saves commuters’ valuable time. However by eliminating congestion, commuters discover the time saving benefits of the bigger street that results in people shifting away from buses, carpools, bicycles and other forms of transportation. The result is many times the bigger road soon becomes congested again. This is what happened throughout the 1950’s and 60’s as the government built Interstate Highways into and out of large metropolitan areas causing them to become stop and go during rush hour as commuters abandoned street cars, buses, and commuter railroads. Perhaps one solution is to keep streets narrow with traffic circles at intersections as they result in fewer accidents and less pollution according to traffic engineers as they move traffic more effectively than intersections with cross traffic. The roads would no longer need intersections with two left turn lanes, two straight lanes and a right turn lane.

Once again higher gas prices cause commuters to switch to alternative modes of transportation, thereby reducing congestion while increasing government gas tax receipts. This additional revenue should be used to make the alternatives more convenient and available. Gasoline has an inelastic demand which means the demand for gasoline will go down by less than the percent increase in price, thereby the government collects more gasoline tax, even though fewer miles are driven.