**AIA Minneapolis 2021 City Council Questions**

**Sustainable Design/Resiliency**

The building sector accounts for nearly half of carbon dioxide emissions in the United States per year – more than any other sector. U.S. buildings alone are responsible for more CO2 emissions annually than those of any other country except China. Most of these emissions come from the combustion of fossil fuels to provide heating, cooling, and lighting, and to power appliances and electrical equipment.

**How will you work with architects and the city to prepare Minneapolis for the impacts of climate change?**

First of all, let me be clear. I’m going to talk about this issue, from the point of view of, if we really wanted to develop a plan and have it actually work. I intend to work to make the city enlist the assistance of qualified experts and experienced advocates for all of the associated issues around climate change. We already have people posing and using the opportunity to grandstand on political issues that end up creating noise, and not moving us anywhere towards our needed directions. That has to end. Talking points and message framing is not going to solve any of the problems were facing, or actually allow us to achieve in real life, the concepts so elegantly stated and rallied around for campaign purposes and political point scoring. In a very real sense, I believe the city needs to end any direct involvement with this issue by elected officials, NONE OF WHOM have any real-world experience or could be considered “experts” in the field. I think that meeting our various “adopted policies” around issues such as the environment, renewable energy and climate change begins with getting politicians out of the way of our actual progress.

We need to bring in talented and experienced, industry professionals to imagine, craft, and create step-by-step, year-by-year plans of action that cannot be altered or defunded. We need to authorize a division of nonpartisan and unbiased, strategical and technical experts who will be solely responsible for the success of this plan. Partnering with trusted and proven leaders, in the private sector, NGOs, at the University of Minnesota, etc., to finalize realistic programs that we as a city can actually accomplish, rather than pie-in-the-sky, theoretical political concepts that may or may not ever move past the stump speech level, is the only possible way we’re ever going to solve this problem and achieve these stated goals. We must remove politics and politicians from these practical, policy issues and allow the true experts to design implement and take full responsibility for this change of direction.

**How will you incentivize approaches to design, construction, and operations to move these goals forward?** The City needs to change its approval process and financial incentives to prioritize existing infrastructure preservation, creation of ownership opportunities, and good design.

I strongly support the programs coming from the federal government, including energy retrofitting programs, solar electricity generation, electric vehicle infrastructure, weatherization programs and a wide variety of other programs. We will have funding to more forward programs that will address climate change in a way we couldn’t before. I would challenge architects to help find the best ways of implementing these programs.

I believe we need to preserve existing structures wherever possible because it is a sunk carbon cost. Even the improved energy efficiency of new construction doesn’t offset the carbon cost of building new infrastructure. I would challenge architects to find ways of improving and repurposing existing infrastructure before demolition.

I also think that design is very important. For example, some of new development is being built without greenspace, creating issues of flooding. Development is now being built without parking, which will mean there is no place to charge electric vehicles. I would challenge architects to be forward thinking in how our city moves into the new climate future.

I also think we have the opportunity to increase the housing element of particular areas of our city, including our downtown, which would have large positive climate impacts. The most important aspect to my approach would be developing real partnerships with the organizations and industry advocacy groups that understand these issues better than I do and making sure we’re hearing from the experts that know how to accomplish the goals we claim to pursue.

**Development/Affordable Housing**

**Investment and development efforts in Minneapolis have historically been uneven and have led to both prosperity and displacement. As a member of the City Council, what specific solutions do you have to foster development and affordable housing that serves the multifaceted needs of Minneapolis businesses and residents? To what extent are public-private partnerships or taxpayer-supported development part of the solution?**

Part of my platform has been to push to reverse our city’s imbalance of prioritizing developing rental units and catering to increasing our reliance on renters and rental space. To grow the wealth, and specifically, shrink the wealth gap in our city, we need a comprehensive refocusing on transitioning renters into homeownership. To accomplish this, we need a strategic set of intelligent plans to both increase our supply of affordable homes and also, decrease the demand for renting. We first need to understand the reasons for the lack of production of affordable housing. In Minneapolis, zoning was never really reducing affordable housing production. In Minneapolis, the hinderance to affordable housing production is the cost of construction. According to Mortensen’s Construction Cost Index, the cost of construction has gone up 50% in real dollars since 2010. There is an increasing portion of the marketplace that the private sector cannot provide affordable housing for. This is the essence of our affordable housing crisis.

This means that existing housing will always be less expensive than new housing. We need to preserve existing housing wherever we can. Because of this, I am in favor of tightening zoning to preserve existing housing stock and maintain it for future generations. This also makes sense as existing housing has already been paid for from a carbon and energy perspective. I would support repurposing existing housing to higher capacities where possible especially where this can create affordable housing.

New affordable housing can only be produced with subsidies, either from the public sector or the private sector. But the issue isn’t just housing production. 95% of new housing built since the Great Recession has been rental. When we talk about affordable housing, we need to talk about ownership housing that builds wealth, not just rental. Lack of home ownership is the biggest cause of racial economic disparities, and we need to reverse this. Because of this, I strongly support shifting existing City affordable housing programs to the production of ownership housing, not rental.

Also, 70% of new housing built has been one bedroom or less and 95% has been two bedrooms or less. This is in a city where one out of every five persons is a child under the age of 18. In many ways, our affordable housing crisis is a crisis for families. I would redirect existing affordable housing programs to support the construction of housing units with three and more bedrooms. This would also help stem the flow of larger families out of the city.

**Equity in the Built Environment**

**We see wide disparities in access to quality housing, access to spaces to work and play, and access to the process that creates and designs these places in the City of Minneapolis. How would you address these as a member of the Council?**

There are 3 types of committees that I plan to be on, work closely with and focus my attentions towards in a very specific way. All 3 categories of council committees are directly related to these points. The environmental committees (southside and northside green zone council, community environmental advisory, and related groups) the racial equity committees (latino empowerment, racial equity, transgender equity, civil rights commission, etc.) and the business and development committees. (workforce development, planning commission, etc.)

As a small business owner in Minneapolis for almost 3 decades, I understand the connectivity between community and the business it supports. As someone who has had thriving businesses suddenly upended and cut short simply due to shifting social conditions and technology. (I had a popular Video Store and an international phone card wholesale distribution company both suddenly cease to exist because of advances in technology that were outside of my control…) I get how important it is to be innovative and cognizant of the future and the potential positive and negative impacts.

The Ninth Ward took the brunt of the destruction from the riots in 2020. I would work to help rebuild these businesses. We need small business support, grants, and loans to impacted businesses. We also need to aggressively recruit new businesses to not just Minneapolis generally but to the 9th Ward specifically. Incentive programs need to be focused on the poorer parts of the City and not just reinforcing existing patterns of wealth.

In addition, we need to change our zoning and development incentive programs to incentivize development in the poorer parts of the City, like the 9th Ward. Right now, most development is going to Uptown/Southwest and Northeast and little goes to the rest of the City. This is just reinforcing existing disparities. We need to use our zoning code, incentives programs and approval processes to support a more equitable dispersion of development.

**Post-COVID Downtown Core**

**The COVID pandemic has drastically changed the way people live, work, and play. Even though the situation is still quite fluid, what changes do you expect to see in the downtown core and beyond?**

There is a real question whether we will see the numbers of people working in downtown that we have in the past. It may be that the shift to working at home is permanent and that downtown will never be the business center it once was. But this is an opportunity. Having people shifting their workspace to their homes opened up their previous workspace to being repurposed. This gives us the opportunity to turn downtown into a true walkable, transit-supported housing environment. We could repurpose much of the downtown office space into housing. People could live and work downtown and access most of what they need through the skyways. This would be a much more energy-efficient and carbon-efficient lifestyle and could house many people without new construction. It could make the downtown more vibrant than it was in the past.

This also raises questions about how we upgrade and develop the future of our mass transit system. As we have always had a downtown centric system, significant changes in the way we structure our working and recreating may have ripple effects that move through other institutional systems, such as transit. We need to be constantly studying these patterns to prepare ourselves for meaningful changes that become necessary.

**2040 Plan Implementation**

**The Minneapolis 2040 Plan is already having broad and deep impacts on the City’s built environment. What will you do as a City Council member to ensure that the goals of the plan are met? Where do you see the greatest opportunity to address inequities?**

**What are your priorities in implementation?**

I need to state at the outset that this particular conformance plan, “the 2040 plan”, was drastically divergent than our past conformance plans. It was made from the top, not from a grassroots, community-based design. It was extremely political, folding in many political agendas, including some that people would describe as “extremist” or even “fringe”. There was no environmental impact study included, and several components were clearly included against the wishes and desires or the people. The process of input and feedback was virtually ignored and consequently, there are court actions and cases making their way through our system. I find it highly probable that the entire plan, or at least significant portions of it, may be disqualified. In other words, I won’t be surprised if we are forced to re-create a brand new plan.

Regardless of the outcome in the court, I think we need to make changes to the 2040 Plan to redistribute investment into lower-income communities. The City is projected to grow 10% over the next 20 years and right now, too much investment is going into existing wealthy parts of the City, deepening existing disparities. We need to focus growth into the lower income parts of the City and the existing 2040 Plan does not do that. To do this, we need to restrict development in some parts of the City so development can flow to areas experiencing inequities.

We also need to acknowledge the shift away from transit. Local transit ridership declined 25% over the six years prior to COVID and has declined another 40% as of today. Basing our infrastructure plan on a transportation mode that literally people are walking away from does not make sense. On top of it, the automotive industry is phasing out gas-powered cars. Our city is screaming out for economic justice. This means that people need to be able to get to jobs and customers need to get to businesses easily and quickly. We need to change the 2040 Plan to support economic justice and access to wealth.

In addition, parents travel more than any other group and use transit at one-quarter the rate of non-parents. It is usually impossible for parents to get children to school in any mode other than driving, especially in the wintertime. At the same time, a large number of children are living in poverty. We need a transportation system that supports parents and children and their need to access schools and jobs.

**Additional Questions**

**How would you work with architects to realize your vision for Minneapolis?**

I have to say, I’m not an architect. Luckily, I know several, and have a strong enough relationship with high level experts in that field to trust their opinions about which groups and organizations are unbiased, impartial and nonpartisan advocates for their craft. I am very much looking forward to meeting with architects and developers as we move forward to hear their perspectives. Bringing in apolitical partners to help design policy, regulations and guidelines is the only way our city govt. will be able to effectively include intelligent planning through architectural design into our city’s future. I look forward to meaningful conversations with people and groups, like AIA Minneapolis, who represent the field and can help educate and inform important policymaking at multiple levels of govt.

**And what can we as architects do to work with the city of Minneapolis to move your vision forward?**

Partnerships are 2-way streets. As the next city council member in the 9th Ward, I will need your input, feedback, suggestions, comments, ideas and critiques to effectively incorporate all of the necessary elements of design and structure into our planning. We cannot wait until after things are in motion to retroactively address problems and concerns. We must take bold action and be forceful in letting our vices be heard. Just like I tell average everyday residents in our 9th Ward neighborhoods, I give people my direct phone number because it’s easier to simply call me if you have a problem. This way, I know personally, right away, what’s going on, and we can work on solving the issue together. So, I would tell you, don’t be shy about raising your voice, raising the alarm, bringing issues to my attention in advance when you hear about something, or see something happening with which you do not agree. I will always listen and take your advice seriously, because after all, I believe we all want the same thing. It’s obvious that, lately, our city govt. has not acted or operated at the highest level of competency or achievement. We cannot change the past, but we can change our future by committing to working together more collaboratively to problem solve and intelligently plan for a better city in our future.