


2023 City Commission Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Amber Sellers 

1. How long have you lived in Lawrence and what do you do for a living?
 - I moved to Lawrence in the fall of 1999 and stayed until 2008. In 2019, I relocated back to Lawrence to be closer to work in Topeka. Currently, I serve as the Advocacy Director for Trust Women Foundation.

2. What experience do you have that you believe qualifies you to be a strong city commissioner?
 - I have 20+ years of professional experience in government affairs, research, regulatory, and public policy. My experience tracking and interpreting the impacts of state legislation on local governing makes me a unique asset to local governing. Having worked in public health, I have utilized that knowledge to drive meaningful, measurable performance outcomes. Each of these characteristics should be considered, especially when working with city staff, to set priorities and address the needs within the community. Additionally, my ability to inform and engage people directly while teaching policy implementation speaks to my passion for civic engagement – a vital characteristic for a Commissioner.

3. What do you believe is the City's role in supporting the development of high-paying jobs and economic development in general?
 - The role of the City is to drive economic development discussions and serve as a primary partner in building framework, strategies, and incentives to be deployed. This work requires a balance of nonfinancial and sector-specific financial incentives, each critical to boosting economic growth and increasing tax collection. Incentives that address infrastructure improvements, targeted workforce training, expedited processes, and access to developed industrial sites are vital to attracting businesses for the City's economic growth.

4. In your opinion, what are the three most important issues facing the City right now, and how would you propose to address them? If your solutions require additional funding, how would you propose to fund them?
 - For this question, I will focus on two with reference to a third. To accomplish true prosperity and economic security, we must breathe innovation into our economic development strategies for new small business growth. Understanding the nuances and roadblocks of the small business experience, especially those from systemically and structurally divested populations, is critical. One way to move this effort is by reimagining current funding from our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to expand opportunities for equitable small business growth citywide. The second would be to continue to work on the countywide housing plan and strategies to bridge access to housing for all – funding strategies are highlighted in question #6 with emphasis on legislative action to appropriate some of the projected \$3.2 billion in surplus cash and nearly \$1 billion more in the rainy day fund to assist communities in bringing new permanent supportive, low, and moderate-income housing online through collaborative development with the private sector and area community housing development organizations. Lastly, we must continue positioning ourselves to benefit from the potential economic spillover, manufacturing, and supplier hub impacts the Panasonic battery plant will create.

5. What is your experience with organizational budgets?
 - My experience includes over ten years of service on various organizational boards, Four years of monitoring agency and state legislative budget sessions, and two years of Commission experience with the CIP and annual budget. Additionally, I have actively participated in budget processes and reviews for several 501c4 and c7 organizations in my recreational work.

6. (Two part) On a scale of 1-10, how important is creating new residential homeownership opportunities (not rental)? What resources should the City of Lawrence deploy to assist with housing creation?
 - First, the creation of residential housing for ownership sits at 7 out of 10. This approach must balance the desire for market-rate housing with the need for moderate-income and permanent supportive housing for unhoused individuals. With additional state tools and policies, our city can continue bringing on more affordable housing, including mid-market density housing. The Kansas Affordable Housing Tax Credit enacted by HB 2237 in 2022 leverages state housing tax credits alongside federal LIHTC funds. The recent expansion of the Reinvestment Housing Incentive District program utilizes a percentile rebate back to developers who complete improvements to property (or properties) within an approved RHID redevelopment plan. Coupled with current efforts to revise our zoning codes, Lawrence will be in a position to grow homeownership in an economically diverse way that brings equity in homeownership that our city has not seen in decades.

7. What are your thoughts on the City's response to the homelessness issue and/or the current version of the *Community Plan to End Homelessness*? Does anything stand out that you would change, add, or delete?
 - Addressing the unhoused in our community has been a point of conflict – politically, socially, and culturally. Historically, housing policies have never centered on accessibility and affordability for all. Stigma against and dehumanizing people experiencing houselessness must be mitigated in our city. To create a meaningful impact, we must acknowledge that behavioral health access through increased workforce and services - along with additional permanent, affordable housing and temporary sheltering is tantamount to moving Lawrence toward functional zero. With an initial cost estimate exceeding \$50M, the need for state-level financial support must be expected for the plan to be successful.