

# Ames council candidates discuss affordable housing

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The city of Ames needs to do something about affordable housing.

That was the theme of a city council candidate forum at the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 Sixth St., Monday night, held by AMOS, an interfaith, non-profit organization. More than 100 people attended the forum.

The candidates were asked a series of yes-or-no questions put forth by the organization, ranging from whether a candidate would support free bus fare for children to how the city should spend its Community Development Block Grant Program funds, or adjusting the Land Use Policy Plan, among other things.

All the candidates expressed a concern about housing in the city, but not all were willing to support all of the proposals put forth at the forum.

Mayor Ann Campbell, who is running unopposed for re-election, said the issue was more complicated than the yes-or-no questions posed. She said Ames has a good history of partnering with different groups, such as Iowa State University or the United Way and AMOS, and that that would spur a conversation among the different organizations to try to combat the housing problems in the city.

Amber Corrieri, candidate for the at-large seat, said Monday night was only the start of the discussion to help tackle the issue of affordable housing in Ames. She said it will take more than just the people in attendance to face the issue.

"The issues that we discussed tonight are all very important," she said.

Victoria Szopinski, incumbent for the Ward 4 seat, who was supportive of many of the measures proposed, said she had learned a lot and welcomed the opportunity to learn more in order to be a better representative on issues of affordable housing.

Chris Nelson, who is challenging Szopinski in the fourth ward, said he also learned a lot from Monday night's discussion.

"We do have a problem, we do need to figure out how to solve it," he said.

Tim Gartin, candidate for Ward 2, said the city has been doing a lot to address the issue of affordable housing. The issue in Ames is that there was a shortage of housing across the board, he said.

"We don't have enough houses," he said.

Justin Dodge, candidate in Ward 1, said Monday night was a start.

"I think that we've just started the dialogue, and that's the most important component," he said.

Gloria Betcher, candidate for Ward 1, said in order to take on the issue of affordable housing, it had to involve people across the city of Ames.

"This has to be an issue for the entire community," she said.

Anne Kinzel, candidate for the at-large seat, was unable to attend the forum. However, a representative read remarks for the candidate. In it, she expressed her hope and confidence of tackling the issue of affordable housing in the city.

"The creation of a wide range of housing opportunities is a complex, but not intractable problem," she said in the statement.

Peter Orazem, Ward 3 candidate, said, that the Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team, or ASSET, is the preferred mechanism to address affordable housing in Ames. He also said that comparing housing prices around the county, it's about one-third less expensive to live outside of Ames than in the city.

"We may not have as much of a housing issue as we have a transportation issue," he said. "And it may be that it's more cost-effective to try to help people commute in and out of Ames than it is to try to have everybody live in Ames, which I think with current land prices would be very difficult."