

The St. George Area Chamber of Commerce distributed a questionnaire for comment from all St. George City Council candidates in an effort to raise voter awareness on critical issues affecting business in Southern Utah. This document contains the full and unedited statements from candidates who submitted responses by publication on Friday, August 1st and successfully made it through the September 5th primary election.

What is your approach to addressing and managing public concern, specifically relating to infrastructure projects or large developments?

Jimmie Hughes

The best approach is actively seek out input from as many members of the public as possible. Public input is vital and can often result in solutions that were not previously thought of. Once input is received and decisions made, that information needs to be readily available to citizens. Be open and transparent is always the best way.

Steve Kemp

Infrastructure projects are usually city, county or state owned. These facilities are completed using impact fees, or other funds such as gas tax or federal grants. They should be completed as economically as possible and the costs associated with them should be directly related to the users, if at all possible. Large development of private land should adhere to the general plan whenever possible or should go through a review process set up by the municipality in which the land is located. Public input on these large projects should be taken earlier rather than later in the process.

Dannielle Larkin

Education about infrastructure and how it affects our city and our economic future is key. Infrastructure is both necessary and incredibly expensive. Understanding how to best utilize the infrastructure we already have, what the true costs are for both installation and maintenance, who is really footing the bill, are we saving to maintain in perpetuity, how do we keep our costs as low as possible while keeping our services dependable, safe, and future focused. These are the topics that must be discussed and debated publicly, understood at a local level, and addressed in a timely manner so that both residents and business owners feel confidence that the city will be able to address and keep up with their short and long term needs.

Brad Bennett

First and foremost, I recognize that the concerns and input of the residents are invaluable. I am committed to actively listening to the community's opinions, questions, and suggestions. This means organizing town hall meetings and community forums where residents can voice their concerns and ask questions directly. By fostering an environment of open dialogue, we can ensure that the concerns of the public are heard and acknowledged.

Transparency is crucial in maintaining public trust. I will work to provide clear and accessible information about proposed infrastructure projects or developments. This includes offering detailed project descriptions, visual aids, and potential impacts, as well as outlining the benefits that these projects could bring to our city. Transparency helps build understanding and dispel misinformation, fostering a sense of cooperation between the city council and the community.

Additionally, I am a strong advocate for involving the public in the decision-making process. When feasible, I will explore avenues for gathering feedback through polls, surveys, and advisory committees. Engaging residents in this manner not only ensures that their perspectives are taken into account but also promotes a sense of ownership and collaboration in shaping the future of our city.

Recognizing that complex infrastructure projects can impact the local environment, traffic flow, and overall quality of life, I will advocate for conducting impact assessments as much as possible. These assessments will consider potential disruptions and propose mitigation strategies to minimize negative effects on the community. By sharing these assessments with the public, we can collectively address concerns and find solutions that strike a balance between growth and the well-being of our residents.

What infrastructure improvements would you prioritize to enable mobility, support business expansion, and encourage commerce? How would you fund these projects?

Jimmie Hughes

Two of the most crucial infrastructure improvements for mobility are the 3000 East widening and the extension of 1450 South to I-15. Funding will be a combination of State, Federal and local funds.

Another priority for business expansion is the development of Tech Ridge to attract tech companies and higher wages. There is a lot of much needed infrastructure on that site and funding for that is planned to come from a mix of sale or trade of the city owned property and tax deferment by partnering taxing agencies.

Water is an essential part of the equation. Top priority on that front is the Graveyard Wash Reservoir that will be used to store treated re-use water that can be used in our secondary water system. Paid for by money secured from a one time appropriation from the state legislature, local funds and partnering with the Washington County Water District.

I will continue to prioritize these projects.

Steve Kemp

George Washington Boulevard completion from I-15 exit 5 to Southern Parkway Exit 7 should be completed ASAP. believe funding is already in place for this project. Other projects currently part of the Dixie MPO masterplan need to be addressed as needed.

Dannielle Larkin

The city of St. George has a transportation plan, active transportation plan, and a complete streets plan that have all been created with in depth study and input from community partners and professionals in order to meet the transportation and infrastructure needs of our city. These plans are being evaluated and re-evaluated on a regular basis to flex and evolve with the changing needs of the economy, businesses and residents. I sit on the Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization board as well as the Active Transportation board for the City of St. George, where we have monthly discussions about how to best meet the ever changing mobility needs of the community. This month we have been actively pursuing Federal grant funds to create an additional vehicle/pedestrian corridor under I-15 at 400 E and 900 S in order to best move traffic and people in an area that has been a dangerous route to schools as well as a traffic pinch point in the city. This, along hundreds of other areas of discussion, including public and professional discussions, are what make up our infrastructure improvement plans for the city. Funding is always multi-faceted. We have had great success over the past few years with grant applications for special projects that have vastly improved our systems without overburdening our local taxpayers.

Brad Bennett

Prioritizing road and transportation improvements is of utmost importance. By enhancing road networks, optimizing traffic flow, and potentially increasing investments in public transit options, we can effectively address congestion and ensure efficient mobility for both residents and businesses. Additionally, the establishment of pedestrian and cyclist-friendly pathways can significantly contribute to creating an accessible and dynamic urban environment that promotes commerce.

To ensure the realization of these projects, a blend of strategies could be deployed. Alongside our existing infrastructure budget, collaboration with private entities offers a promising avenue to distribute the financial responsibility of substantial projects. Moreover, exploring state and federal grants earmarked for infrastructure development could potentially provide a substantial portion of the necessary funding.

Amid the current housing crisis, what will you as a local official do to encourage or enable affordable housing?

Jimmie Hughes

High land prices make this a difficult task. Being open to new housing ideas and creative solution is a must. Balancing the impact fees to be sufficient to cover infrastructure costs but no more than needed to keep from over inflating the already high cost of housing. Continue to provide wider options for ADU's (Accessory Dwellings Units). There are some creative ideas on ways to fund these and keep payments low.

Inventory is the biggest key when trying to affect the cost in a free market. Increasing housing variety and supply in a steady and balanced way will help bring pricing to a more affordable range. Following the recently renewed master plan will help ensure balance in this effort.

Steve Kemp

work to simplify the process to approve new projects or building permits.

Dannielle Larkin

There are dozens of tools that can be employed to solve our affordable housing crisis, we just need to be willing to make sure our policies and procedures don't make it impossible to make use of effective strategies. So policy review and alteration is number one. Answering the question: Are our zoning laws too restrictive in areas that make it challenging for developers to fill this need? Do our impact fees need to be restructured so that smaller units with less impact are not paying the same as larger homes with larger impact? Are we making effective use of our Community Development Block Grants? Are we getting in the way of developer's ability to use available federal and state grants that make it easier to build affordable units? One thing I am proud that we accomplished since I've been on the council is creating an ordinance that allows for ADU's (accessory dwelling units) in addition to any primary dwelling. This is an excellent way to add gently density to an already developed area without over taxing the infrastructure. I would love for us to consider form-based code as an option for downtown and Tech Ridge. We should also be having discussions about educating our citizenry on housing affordability issues, addressing fears and concerns.

Brad Bennett

While direct housing construction isn't within the city government's scope, we can certainly help facilitate meaningful solutions. Streamlining the approval process and removing unnecessary barriers is key, as it encourages private-sector investment and innovation in affordable housing projects. I am in favor of exploring property tax incentives that motivate developers to contribute to impactful initiatives.

Moreover, I advocate for a graduated scale for impact fees. This would benefit affordable housing endeavors by reducing their burden and subsequently cutting construction expenses. These collective steps will establish an environment conducive to increased affordable home construction, expanding choices for our residents.

How will you support businesses and ensure the area thrives, including our historic main street and downtown?

Jimmie Hughes

The purpose of the recent downtown master plan was undertaken for this very purpose. This was accomplished by having a collaborative group of interested residents and businesses owners from the downtown area as well as city planners, and engineers and council members. I will continue with that collaborative effort to ensure business owners will continue to receive the support they need.

Continued support of St George Musical Theater and their building is an important step in bringing people to downtown and South Main. I will continue to support them.

I will also push forward with getting proposals for the city owned property on St George Blvd. The potential for this property is very exciting.

Steve Kemp

Add more mixed use areas. Work with city officials to simplify the approval process for new businesses. Especially businesses that already have to get county or state agency approvals.

Dannielle Larkin

I have been a strong proponent for supporting local businesses throughout my time on council and I will continue to have this be one of my #1 focus areas. Historic Downtown is the heart and soul of our community. As such, we must preserve and protect its character, charm, and ability to be our economic hub. Creativity in mixed use commercial/retail/housing downtown will be vital for continued success. Downtown is where visitors and residents alike gather to celebrate our traditions and culture, as well as where we will build new traditions and celebrations. We have worked hard to build a brand that includes activity and optimism, as well as making our downtown a historic, art centered, lively gathering space that is inviting to all. I will continue to champion economic creativity and success in our incredible downtown. In fact, I love and cherish downtown so much, I sold my home in Little Valley a few years ago and built downtown. We have loved the opportunity to bike and walk in our charming city center!

Brad Bennett

I'm committed to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy while ensuring safety, fostering an environment where businesses can flourish in the face of changing challenges.

The Economic Development Department is a crucial resource. I'm dedicated to promoting its services, which encompass overcoming obstacles and accessing grants and tax incentives. By maximizing its potential, we can empower all local businesses.

Supporting our historic downtown area includes expanding parking choices and encouraging diverse events. These actions will draw more visitors, leading to increased business activity.

What will be your strategy for increasing economic opportunity (i.e. number of jobs, higher paying jobs, etc.) in St. George for future generations?

Jimmie Hughes

I have been privileged to be a part of hiring the cities new Economic Development Director. He is going to be an incredible asset in promoting economic growth in St George. Tech Ridge is our flagship effort to attract higher paying jobs to benefit future generations. Continued support for that development is a must.

Steve Kemp

Get the Tech Ridge CDA finished ASAP. Within reason, provide support and let the free market work to create jobs. Government does not create jobs, private companies create jobs.

Dannielle Larkin

My husband and I own a commercial plumbing/HVAC business so we have been part of the building economy, but we are the first to recognize that our economy must become more diversified for our future success. I have been very supportive of the University's move to a poly-tech vision, of Tech Ridge and of the school district's focus on tech. Higher paying tech jobs will be an important part of our future economic growth. Encouraging local entrepreneurship and making sure the city is a business friendly environment is vital. Supporting education is a big part of the vision. We need the local talent pool for local businesses to thrive. We must foster economic growth with business friendly policies and a welcoming and inclusive environment. We must ask ourselves if we are doing all we can to build a resilient economy. Do we have quality, affordable infrastructure in place that businesses can depend upon? Are we building an environment that is safe, affordable, livable, healthy, with a strategic vision for the future?

Brad Bennett

I am committed to bolstering economic opportunity in St. George for future generations by fostering a thriving and diverse business ecosystem that caters to enterprises of all sizes. Job creation is paramount, and achieving this entails attracting new industries and supporting the growth of existing businesses. Supporting initiatives like Tech Ridge, which has already shown promise in cultivating innovation and economic growth, will ensure we have well-paying jobs needed for the future. By forging strong partnerships with local educational institutions, we can develop specialized training programs that equip our workforce with the skills demanded by evolving industries, thus creating a sustainable talent pipeline. This approach, grounded in collaboration, strategic investment, and education-industry alignment, will drive employment, attract industries, and ultimately establish a resilient economic landscape for the benefit of both present and future residents.

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