

Aspire North 2023 Traverse City Candidate Questionnaire

Full name: Merek Roman

Office running for: City Commission of Traverse City

Current position/occupation: Energy Economist

List previous campaigns, elected office(s), boards, commissions, etc.:

Vice President of Slabtown Neighborhood Association

Board of Zoning Appeals - City of Traverse City

Boardmember of Networks Northwest

Grand Traverse Economic Development Corporation - (2022)

Why are you running for office?

I am running to address the pressing need for affordable housing, ensuring a sustainable approach to TIF97 or advocating for a cost-sharing plan, and devising a comprehensive strategy to tackle the homelessness issue in the Pines. As a homeowner, analytical engineer, and community-minded individual, I am committed to creating a Traverse City that is inclusive and innovative. My goal is to develop strategies and policies that will pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future for our city.

Briefly describe your campaign strategy:

I am positioning myself as a Traverse City native who ventured out for higher education and industry experience, only to return with a passion to contribute to the community I call home. After purchasing a house here, I'm driven to use my leadership skills and knowledge to shape a city where I envision raising my future family. My education at the Traverse City Academy has deepened my understanding of our city's operations. My campaign strategy includes leveraging social media advertising, attending local events, and personally reaching out to residents by knocking on over 2,000 doors.

Why do you think you will win?

I am confident in my campaign because I advocate for a practical approach, emphasizing the importance of revitalizing our infrastructure and recognizing the genuine benefits of a TIF. While I prioritize the safety of our neighborhoods, I also

emphasize the need to compassionately address homelessness by connecting individuals with essential resources. My youthful energy, paired with my knowledge and dedication, positions me as a standout candidate for the role.

How many votes do you need to win?

Drawing parallels to the 2013 race where seven candidates vied for votes, a total of 10,701 votes were cast, resulting in a closely contested outcome. On average, candidates secured 14.25% (1,435 votes), with the top candidate garnering 20.37% (2,051 votes). Excluding the lowest performer who received just 2.5% (252 votes), the average rises to 16.2% (1,631 votes), indicating a 4% gap between the average and the top candidate. Reflecting on the 2021 race with its 14,182 votes and minimal competition, and anticipating a more competitive 2023 race with contentious ballot measures, I project a voter turnout of 15,000. To emerge as the leading candidate on November 7th, 2023, I'll aim for 3,055 votes, which is over 700 votes above the anticipated average.

Are REALTORS actively helping with your campaign?

Yes, I have a couple friends within the real-estate industry that I ask for feasibility of policy measures and what the current mood of market is.

What are your thoughts on Traverse City's municipal budget? Budget cuts, increases, or funding initiatives you support? Service you believe could be delivered more efficiently?

In alignment with our mission to guide the preservation and development of Traverse City's infrastructure, services, and planning, we recognize the importance of sustainable and forward-thinking financial strategies. Leveraging expected revenue increases from property taxes, the uncapping of property values due to household transactions, and the intergovernmental revenue from marijuana sales, I aim to channel these funds towards our capital improvement projects laid out by the City. These revenue streams not only reflect the evolving economic landscape of our city but also underscore our commitment to ensuring that our infrastructure and services meet the needs and aspirations of our citizens. By doing so, we are not only serving the immediate needs of Traverse City but also laying the groundwork for a sustainable future. This approach is rooted in the extensive participation of our citizens, and the expertise of our City's staff.

The shortage of housing inventory is a big topic among our Aspire North membership and the community at large across our area. Does local government

have a role to play in this realm? If so, what do you think a local government can reasonably do to address housing supply concerns?

Local government plays a crucial role in shaping our community's housing landscape. One effective approach to address our housing shortage is through the implementation of a PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) program. This program offers incentives to developers, promoting the creation of affordable housing units and increasing our housing inventory (the city is able to . However, while we strive to meet housing demands, it's imperative to retain the voice of our community. I firmly believe in the importance of neighborhood associations having a say in new construction projects. Ensuring public involvement in significant zoning decisions not only preserves the character of our neighborhoods but also fosters a sense of community ownership and pride.

Land use continues to be a highly debated issue, including those elements centered around planning and zoning. Are there specific policies or zoning restrictions you support or oppose?

Land use, particularly in the realms of planning and zoning, is a complex issue that requires a balanced approach. I firmly oppose by-right construction, especially when it comes to triplex and quadplex buildings. While these structures can serve a purpose in addressing housing needs, it's essential that our city residents retain a meaningful voice in the process. Removing their ability to provide input on such developments is not in line with the community-driven ethos I believe in.

Furthermore, we must consider innovative solutions that don't compromise the unique character of Traverse City. Given our geographical constraints near Lake Michigan, we should leverage the land availability in surrounding communities. By establishing a robust transportation system, we can effectively address housing demands without altering the city's aesthetic. It's crucial to understand that density-driven ordinances, while aiming to increase housing, can inadvertently place a financial burden on taxpayers. Instead, by viewing transportation as a form of affordable housing, we can create a more inclusive and sustainable approach to land use.

Should local governments use zoning to prohibit the rental of a residential property on a short-term basis?

Local governments should not outright prohibit the short-term rental of residential properties, but there must be clear limitations in place. Traverse City already has a permit system to regulate short-term rentals, and it's crucial to enforce these regulations to prevent illegal rentals. I fully support owner-occupied bnb's and believe homeowners should have avenues to generate revenue from their properties. However, our approach must be balanced. We need to respect the rights of property owners while also ensuring that our long-term housing goals are not compromised. It's about finding the right equilibrium that benefits both homeowners and the broader community.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) has been described as a regional taxation tool used by the Traverse City DDA to fund infrastructure repairs and improvements required by intense regional use of our downtown core. Do you support renewal of TIF? If not, who would/should ultimately pay for those required costs/repairs?

I recognize the value of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as a tool to fund vital infrastructure repairs and improvements in our downtown core, especially given the intense regional use it experiences. However, I believe that any renewal of TIF should come with a comprehensive cost-sharing plan that ensures fairness and transparency. If TIF is not renewed, the costs for these repairs should be collaboratively borne by Traverse City, Grand Traverse County, and the State, ensuring that the financial burden does not fall disproportionately on our local residents. It's essential that we approach this with a sustainable and equitable mindset.

How and on what issues would you utilize Aspire North's input?

Aspire North, being a reputable realtor group focused on public policy, offers invaluable insights into the housing landscape. I would actively seek their expertise on the establishment and implementation of PILOT programs across the state. Their knowledge of how these programs are being rolled out, their successes, challenges, and best practices, would be instrumental in shaping our local approach. Additionally, given the pressing nature of the affordable housing crisis, I would lean on Aspire North for creative solutions and strategies that have been effective elsewhere. Their on-the-ground experience and understanding of housing dynamics would be a critical resource in our collective efforts to address housing affordability in our community.