

***This fall Citizens for a Fair Ferndale (fairferndale.org) seeks to help Ferndale voters get acquainted with those running for public office. To this end, we ask all City Council and Mayor Candidates to complete this CFF Candidate Questionnaire. CFF will use your responses to create formatted .pdfs, linked to the event on Sunday, October 24. We will also post completed questionnaires on our website fairferndale.org and share on social media in the days after the event. Questionnaires should be completed and returned to CFF c/o Bridget Deegan-Krause (bridgetmail@gmail.com) by end of day, Thursday, October 21.***

## **CFF Candidate Questionnaire Mayor and City Council Candidates November 2021 Election**

Name: Laura Mikulski

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***Please provide responses to the following prompts:***

- **Why did you decide to run for City Council/Mayor? What has prepared you to hold a City Council/Mayor seat?**
  - I decided to run for city council to continue to help the residents I've talked to over the years. I believe in service as a function of local government, and my dedication to being a sounding board and advocate is why I've decided to continue my current role if elected.
  - Honestly, nothing prepared me for council. When I was elected in 2019 I thought my time in multiple business types would help- and while that has given me insight into things we're assessing, it hasn't helped me navigate the relationships and functional aspects of municipal government. Government functions on a very different timeline than business, and what makes logical sense doesn't always win out. With that said, my resilience and ability to listen has helped me gain some insight over the past 2 years, and I look forward to gaining a deeper understanding within my next term. I'd like to use my observations and challenges to help create a more robust onboarding and mentorship program for future council members who may not be politically adept or have a background in government.
- **What do you see as the challenges and opportunities faced by the city as it considers future development?**
  - Balancing growth with the desire to keep Ferndale funky and fabulous is both a challenge and an opportunity.

- **How do you see Ferndale moving toward racial equity?**
  - The problems can't be fixed unless we know about them. There are blind spots, and unknown unknowns. We need to bring those who are most impacted to the table in meaningful ways, and ways that fit into THEIR lifestyle, which may not be convenient for us.
  - I think there are four things we can do that can be felt and tangible right away:
    - Implement a Citizen Oversight Board focused on our police department, to provide both accountability as well as empowerment
    - Include POC in our urban planning, both at a departmental level as well as on the commission
    - Invest in softening and unifying the divide between Royal Oak township and Ferndale
    - Provide reinvestment and tax incentives to POC and/or areas of disinvestment to spark recovery and opportunity (while being careful that these investments are designed to ensure they don't price out existing residents and businesses)

***Inclusive Urban Planning:***

- In terms of urban planning, it's a sea of white, higher-income faces making design decisions for a community that isn't that homogenous. This results in a missed opportunity to have the diversity of understanding, ideas, talent, and perspectives within the role that designers have in influencing the constant change of urban and built environments.
- Asking the typically untapped people- artists, misfits, outsiders, elders, people of color, and socio-economically stratified individuals what the most welcoming, liberatory, and authentic spaces are for them is a good start at imagining more for public life and for creating places of greater possibility for all in the public realm.

***Reinvestment:***

- One promising idea is tax credits to rehabilitate distressed homes in communities with low home values, to expand affordable homeownership opportunities for residents, such as the Neighborhood Homes Improvement Act. Property tax relief for low-income homeowners and investments in home repairs are also important for ensuring existing residents can remain and benefit as their neighborhoods improve.

- **Describe what you view as the pros and the cons of the Woodward road diet.**

- I don't see this as pros and cons, more shades of grey in knowns and unknowns.
- In general, I'm supportive of anything that improves walkability and mobility. I also support increasing safety and making walking along Woodward more pleasant. I believe that the experts (elected and hired) have acted in good faith and that the design we're adopting is what they

- o Urban mobility and design is not my forte or focus, and while I've done some research on this my findings haven't really correlated to our situation. For instance, I find that MDOT is very supportive of road diets, but in a 4 lane to 3 lane conversion analysis ([https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/safety\\_and\\_operation\\_analysis\\_lyres.pdf](https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/safety_and_operation_analysis_lyres.pdf)) they acknowledge that there is tremendous variation in the results of road-diet implementations. While most sites result in a reduction in crash frequency, for a few there were crash-frequency increases. While road diets are effective in decreasing left-turn crashes by taking the turning movement from the through lanes and putting it in a two-way left-turn lane, right-lane crashes may increase because of the resulting traffic volume increase in that lane. So, whether there were increases or decreases would appear to largely depend on existing conditions at the implementation site. I have no idea how those findings may be applicable to a much wider road- for instance, would we have less right lane crashes due to our ability to spread traffic across additional lanes? I assume as much, but I'll admit to some anxiety about traffic backups worsening during peak traffic in the right lane.
- o It's no surprise that things come down to cost and citizen demand and information for me. I think we didn't do a great job of explaining to concerned residents that funds for the project come from Major Streets, which is funded by gas tax, not property tax. This lack of clarity and fear of ongoing high taxes has created an atmosphere of distrust that we may have been able to avoid. Conversely, since we're approving a project without knowing the actual final cost, I worry about the disappointment and public perception if the price tag comes back higher than the 1.2M we said we wouldn't go over. I also worry that if we expend the funds from Major Streets and we have something big that would typically be taken care of with Major Streets funding, the funds would need to come from elsewhere, such as the general fund, per our DPW Director.
- o It's funny- in general people say that one of the things they love the most about Ferndale is walkability, but they were also most concerned about walkability. In terms of citizen demand, residents when surveyed were very concerned about safely crossing Woodward, and about creating a more pleasant experience to walk along Woodward. I don't know that the vision of protected bike paths is what those folks who wanted better walkability envisioned when they said they wanted a better walking experience, but our long term vision would be to increase sidewalk width and that I think would be embraced by the widest number of residents.
- o Final thoughts: I almost didn't support this because I truly believe this should be a county initiative, funded more broadly and with buy-in all the way up the corridor. However, it's my understanding that there is support for this from our neighbors to the north in Royal Oak and Berkley, and I hope that MDOT will allow them the ability to have a connecting road diet despite what appears to be heavier traffic (per SEMCOG/MDOT traffic

analysis). Otherwise, this modification will fall short of the intended goal of creating more opportunity for meaningful transportation and would feel more recreational.

- **What is your position on affordable housing in Ferndale?**

- We can't talk about affordability without talking about our property taxes, and that needs to make it into more of our conversations.
- I truly don't believe that we can just build our way out of a lack of affordable housing, but we can certainly provide more affordable housing opportunities. I'd like to see us actually shift our focus a bit from the higher-level 'affordable', to lower income. On page 12 of our demographic analysis from our housing studies (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10npNngBKxUZleYN8sDnLow4IWQuq3-xH/view>) we see that POC have median household income ranging between 27k-47k. Our definition of 'affordable housing' wouldn't include those people, and if we're going to ensure that we include them in our city, we need to make sure that they aren't severely cost burdened. I'd love to see us try to attract more developers like Full Circle who reinvest in their buildings and provide truly affordable rents.

- **What role do city governments have in moving toward climate sustainability?**

- Everything we do counts, and the actions and policy we set today have long-term ramifications for the environment. We must set policy based on data, but also take common-sense approaches to things that may be less easy to quantify and measure. Reducing our own carbon impact is a great start, especially by adapting our inefficient buildings. Common-sense approaches to waste management by reducing the amount of commercial and residential waste that goes into landfills is also fantastic, and we're rapidly moving toward that goal due to the efforts of our specialist Claire. Finally, we must invest in mitigating the impact of stormwater runoff, as basement flooding has become a real hardship for residents.

- **Describe the type of development that you see as most beneficial to Ferndale.**

- I see moderated growth as most beneficial to Ferndale- we should focus on preservation of community & greenspace, sustainability efforts with clear ROI and benefit to the city, and affordable and inclusive housing initiatives. We clearly do not have a problem attracting development to the city. At this point in our growth trajectory I feel we have a responsibility to moderate the growth within the city to reduce our risk of losing what makes Ferndale so special and unique.

- **Where do you see Ferndale in twenty years?**

- o Embracing maturity, while mourning the wild change and freedom of our youth. The phrase “Don’t Royal Oak our Ferndale” was a resounding cry for a reason, and the artists, eccentrics, bohemians, and other non-conformists who made Ferndale a desirable and weird place to live have felt the crunch of urban planning, which doesn’t favor the small and quirky, but rather developers with funding and the savvy to know the processes to get things done. There are ways we can stymie this, of course, through vigilance on maintaining affordability and inclusive design. If we weren’t crippled by the disastrous broken state revenue sharing forced on us by Lansing, we would have much more flexibility in urban planning and while balancing our budgets.