

My name is John Engen and I'm running for mayor of my hometown.

I'm optimistic, energetic and committed to making local government continue to work for all of us.

I'm ready to execute our community plans and find new ways to solve our problems in the same way I have for nearly 16 years now. And I'm ready for any surprises that come our way, because you've given me the trust and privilege of serving you again and again.

I take my responsibility as the City of Missoula's chief executive officer seriously. I know the burdens, the challenges, the opportunities and the surprises that come with being a full-time public servant and it is not easy.

I've been fortunate to work with a team of talented leaders and engaged residents to make our great home place better. Missoula will have a seasoned, energetic, tested leader to help move us forward together.

My next term will be about continuing to deliver the basic services we rely on in our daily lives. I'm committed to taking care of the basics of local government: fire and police protection, health and welfare, water and wastewater, streets and sidewalks, parks and recreation, planning and permitting, criminal prosecution and all of the work that our great staff does every day. And I intend to continue to deliver those services as effectively and economically as possible.

Our community has pressing issues to address. I believe most Missoulians support a well-trained police force, trust those officers to serve and protect them and are willing to invest in good cops. At the same time, I know that we're not perfect and that concerns about violence and racial bias in policing are legitimate, that a mental-health crisis or being unhorsed are not crimes and that we need to meet more needs than ever in keeping residents safe. Toward that end, I approved a grant program to establish a mobile-crisis team to relieve police officers of some of the calls that are best suited to mental-health professionals. I've invested in training to ensure we only use force as a last resort and that our officers are trained in de-escalation, crisis response and implicit bias. And I will continue to invest in innovative programs that take care of our neighbors in crisis and prevent and manage crime, especially violent crime. And, because of my experience, I sit on a national task force that's working to re-imagine public safety in communities large and small.

Equity in all arenas has long been a tenet of our work and strategic plans, but we're making a significant investment of time, money and talent in making our place safe, comfortable and prosperous for all of us while concentrating on ensuring a long history of injustice against indigenous people, Blacks and other people of color is not part of our future. I serve, along with key colleagues at the City and community leaders in the National League of Cities "Cities of Opportunity" collaborative, which is intent on improving the health and well-being of all residents, particularly those disproportionately affected.

Housing is a critical factor in community equity and as mayor I appointed the City's first director of housing, led the effort to craft our first housing policy and assembled a team to execute our housing plan, which serves all Missoulians, because housing is a necessity for all of us. Through strategic investment in property, the City of Missoula, through our redevelopment agency and our housing office, will facilitate the construction of thousands of affordable homes for working people, retirees and folks with economic challenges. In addition, the work we're doing to streamline our planning and permitting will make it easier for our building industry to construct homes that meet the demands of the market. Without seasoned leadership, vision, trust and solid relationships, any solutions to our housing crisis would be piecemeal and inefficient. The next four years will make all the difference in whether Missoula suffers the fate of many popular cities whose middle-class, working residents and seniors are priced out of the market or we rise to the occasion, make bold choices and strategic investment, and fix our housing problem as a community.

Our core values around conservation and climate protection will continue to be manifest in the work we do next term. As we expand our work with partners in the community to restore the Clark Fork River, preserve open space and views and protect our air, we'll implement our plans to use only renewable energy for city operations, become a zero-waste community, improve our hard-won water system and the protect the aquifer that serves it, we'll also expand and improve our trail system and access to the natural environment we cherish. And when leadership fails us at the state and federal level, we'll step up. When President Trump stepped away from the Paris Climate Accords, I joined mayors from around the country to commit to those accords and send a message that cities are serious about global warming.

More and more, cities are taking on roles abdicated by the federal government. Serving the poor, addicted, mentally ill and others suffering in our community will require the kind of leadership and innovation I've engaged in throughout my service as mayor. When it became clear in a global pandemic that unhoused residents could be on the streets suffering from and spreading the deadly COVID-19 virus, we acted quickly to provide safe, dignified shelter. We bought a hotel that's now served about 300 folks who had nowhere else to go, would likely have filled hospital beds and emergency rooms and passed the virus along because they had no choice. And when that hotel is no longer needed to support pandemic relief, it will be part of a larger redevelopment project that will transform the West Broadway corridor, providing housing of all kinds and services to a great, historic neighborhood.

I will work as hard as ever to make Missoula a prosperous, safe, exciting, comfortable home for every one of her residents.

And while I'm a firm believer in planning, leadership is also about managing the unexpected. When the pandemic arrived in Missoula, I assembled a team of key leaders in government, health care, education, the private sector and emergency services to meet daily to plan and implement strategies to keep us as safe as possible and to ensure our health-care system would not be overrun. When it became clear that the rollout of vaccine would be a mess at best without organization, I led the charge to consolidate our vaccine efforts under an incident command team of trained professionals. If you've seen one of our mass clinics in action, you know the level of professionalism, compassion and effectiveness that team is providing. As vaccine has become more available, Missoula is a leader in effective delivery, which will save lives, prevent suffering and restore our economy.

I want to be mayor for another term, one that will require proven leadership, courage, humility and intelligence.

We've seen too clearly the havoc that's the product of inexperienced, arrogant, "outsider" leadership. I stand ready to be of service for the next four years as mayor of the place we love but know can get better.