



Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce  
Questionnaire Responses  
From Jim Edwards and Jean Curtiss  
(Running for Missoula County Commissioner)

The following questionnaire was given to Jim Edwards and Jean Curtiss, candidates running for the Missoula County Commissioner open seat prior to the partnered forums that the Chamber and MAEDC hosted. Both candidates had the option to complete and return the questionnaire back to be published on the Chamber's website. The following are the answers submitted by both candidates.

**1. Why are you running for office?**

Jim Edwards

I believe I can bring business leadership and accountability to office. My years of community involvement give me a track record of getting things done! I will bring more than good intentions to office.

Jean Curtiss

I am running for re-election as Missoula County Commissioner because I have served the citizens of Missoula County for six years and have a record of listening, learning and leading on the issues. I bring a strong work ethic to the office and the interests of the people are my highest priority. I continue to work hard on issues like;

- **Protecting and preserving clean water, the natural environment, and our working farms, ranches and timberlands,**
- **Smart development so urban neighborhoods and rural communities are protected and enhanced, while making housing affordable,**
- **Increased economic opportunity through livable wage jobs and the growth of small businesses so that everyone prospers; and**
- **Affordable health care and meeting the basic needs of our low income and elderly neighbors.**

**2. What are the two most important issues facing Missoula today?**

Jim Edwards

Managed **Growth** with infrastructure which maintains our quality of life. Accountability, we need to be responsive and manage our time and money.

Jean Curtiss

1- Growth issues- transportation system overload, impacts on water quality, wildlife and agricultural lands as well as an increased demand for county services. The taxable value of new construction has only allowed the county to maintain the same level of service. If new construction slows, it could lead to a reduction in the levels of service since revenue will not keep pace with the increased cost of providing those services. The impact of the cost of living on our middle and low income families- with low wages and high housing costs, families are challenged to pay rent, childcare and buy food and access health care. Missoula County

continues to provide financial support to organizations and agencies that serve as a safety net for these families – the young and old. Some of the programs we support are Meals on Wheels for those under 55 who have special needs, Partnership Health Center, Poverello, Food Bank, Mental Health Center, WORD and Salvation Army rent subsidies, child abuse and neglect programs.

### **3. Will you promote business growth in Missoula? If so, how?**

Jim Edwards

I will use my business skills and creativity to **promote** business in Western Montana. I will work to invite new business and especially work to help improve infrastructure for the ones already here. I will work to make relationships that will coincide with our diverse community that will keep our Western Montana Heritage. The airport is one area that we need to maintain a keep improving, transportation is one key area for clean economic growth. Our medical community is second to none and an area we can keep improving on. The University of Montana is an area that brings a lot of economic opportunity and diversity to our community; we need to work hand in hand with our University. Quality schools bring quality people to our area. Again we have a lot to offer and we need to capitalize on our strengths.

Jean Curtiss

The county's Development Park near the airport has been very successful. Using taxes generated in the Industrial Tax Increment District to install infrastructure and provide an attractive setting to expand or recruit businesses has proved a good model and has been visited by other communities. We now have a Technology Tax Increment District, too. This allows businesses meeting the criteria in Montana law to receive tax incentives. Our anchor business in this district is DirecTV.

Other ways local government can promote business- have clear, consistent regulations; have clear processes and procedures; maintain our quality of life- clean water, clean air, access to recreational lands, local government that has sustainable budgets and is responsive to the public.

### **4. What do you feel is the County Government's role in economic development?**

Jim Edwards

I believe that helping provide infrastructure such as safe, efficient roads and fast, efficient technology is an area that government can help to promote business and smart growth. Other areas include a sound transportation system from the Missoula Airport, trucking and rail system in and out of Missoula. We are fortunate enough to have many qualities that will attract good business. We have a great University, we have an incredible medical community, and we have mountains, rivers outdoor activities. We need to promote what we have & quit throwing money away with out getting a return on our dollar.

Jean Curtiss

Missoula county provides support for MAEDC- which manages a revolving loan fund for the county, for MCDC – which has the Small Businesses Development Center, for Bitter Root Economic Development District (BREDD), which serves the 3 county region- Missoula, Mineral and Ravalli. BREDD will focus on regional economic development issues. Partnerships with other local governments, these economic development organizations, the UM and COT and businesses are important. OPG has been successful at grant writing for our community. When

asked why businesses have relocated to Missoula County, our quality of life is often one of the main reasons. Arts and culture, good schools, quality child care, taking care of our young and old, services and retail, access to recreation- active and passive are all important. For the past 4 years, I have served as President of BREDD. We just got a planning grant from EDA to fund a economic development coordinator to facilitate an analysis of the economic sectors in the 3 county region and update the CEDS –Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. With partners like county commissioners, MAEDC, MCDC, the Ravalli County Economic Development Assoc, and the Mineral County Economic Development Assoc, we will reach out to the business community, the educational institutions, the job training folks, and others to find ways to ensure we have the skilled job force businesses need which will also result in better wages for families in the region. We just hired the coordinator and we are ready to get to work.

**5. Do you feel the County Departments operate efficiently and equitably; and what, if any, improvements would you like to see in place?**

Jim Edwards

I believe that all business/government can run more efficiently. We have great opportunity to have better systems a more accountability in place to create a more efficient business/government. Better planning is efficient and more economical then just operating in a reactionary mode. It is time we get a return on our investment.

Jean Curtiss

The commissioners meet monthly with our department heads. We talk about challenges and improvements in their department. Several departments have reorganized to some degree to serve the public better and save tax dollars.

- The motor vehicle dept. and treasurer's office has been cross-trained and staff cross-trained to reduce waiting time. The public can also make an appt. for title transfer.
- The elections and recording depts. have also been cross-trained to better manage peak demands.
- The Clerk of District Court office has been remodeled allowing much better public access to public documents.
- The Rural Initiatives dept. of OPG has grown to serve the rural areas of Missoula County was moved into the old public defender building (that dept. was assumed by the state and moved). County parks, special projects and Public works administration also occupy this space for closer coordination.
- The 2 Justice Courts have consolidated staff and the civil division is located in a separate area- allowing the public to pay fines without being crowded together with those awaiting trial.
- The detention center has contracted with Spectrum for medical services.
- Public works has added the code enforcement program and has been complimented for customer service.
- Our facilities management dept. consolidated and cross-trained the staff at the courthouse and detention center. They also computerized many of the control systems so they can be monitored remotely. For example, we have communication towers on mountaintops that run on propane fueled systems. From the courthouse,

staff monitors that equipment, reducing long trips up the mountain or letting us know there is a problem.

If other improvements are identified, we will respond.

## **6. How will you foster communications with your constituents?**

Jim Edwards

First, I will not hide behind my desk or a committee; I will continue to be a part of our community. I believe that the neighborhood councils are very important because helps maintain the uniqueness each community has. This is great way for elected officials to stay involved and provide better service to each community. Other communication tools, include e-mails, focus groups, be out and visible in the community and the good old fashioned phone. I will treat people like I would like to be treated. We have a wealth of knowledge and places to get local information and share information in the Missoula, area such as the Chamber other quality organizations.

Jean Curtiss

For the past six years, I have always taken calls from citizens or met with them when they come into the office. This is a full-time job. I am available to constituents- 8:30-5:00, at the office, almost every day, M-F, except when I am in scheduled meetings. Numerous phone calls at home are the norm. I also meet with citizens out in the county when asked and have made it a point to attend community meetings throughout the county. Community Councils offer another way for citizens to communicate with the commission as a whole. We now have councils in Lolo, Seeley Lake and Bonner. The voters will decide on Nov 7 whether there will be 2 more- in East Missoula and Swan Valley. I plan to ask the Commission to add a regular spot on our agenda for communication time from each council. My home and work phone numbers are published for the public to contact me and anyone who comes in to my office is welcome.

## **7. Do you support the recommendations of the County Local Government Study Commissions?**

Jim Edwards

I am glad that the people get to vote on this. I do not see how this study will be more beneficial to Missoula County.

Jean Curtiss

I would encourage everyone to read the recommendation to change to a charter form of government, carefully. The county can learn from what the study commission heard in their meetings.

- I agree with the new commissioner districts that more clearly define the boundaries of the 3 districts by referring to county planning districts and city wards so folks know which commissioner represents their district.
- I agree that, whenever possible, the commissioners should serve as the primary liaison for the residents and communities within the district in which they live.
- I agree with maintaining the at-large election of commissioners. This gives everyone in the county the right to vote on every commissioner. The commission is charged with what is best for the whole county, not just their district.
- However, I would be cautious to adopt the proposed charter. According to the report, I don't see that the citizens were overwhelming in favor of a charter. In fact, over 80% of those

surveyed were satisfied with county services. My concerns parallel the ones listed in the minority report – a small commission (3), elected for 6 year terms, will have expanded powers including municipal and self-government powers. This charter does not provide for appropriate separation of executive and legislative powers.

- As to the citizen advocate, the concerns expressed by citizens are valid but I don't believe we need a charter and a mandate for a citizen's advocate to achieve the same goal. Having commissioners serve as a primary liaison to those in their district will improve responses. The new rural initiative department has already served as an advocate for the citizens and helped them navigate through county government.

**8. Do you think the Office of Planning & Grants operates efficiently and provides high quality services to the public? Should the County's participation in OPG continue? Please explain.**

Jim Edwards

This is one area we need to hear from the consumers. We must be responsive to our community and be able to measure what our offices accomplish. The county and the city of Missoula need to work together, be efficient and protect our quality of life in Western Montana.

Jean Curtiss

As the county reviewed the OPG, we were encouraged by the community to keep planning and grants together and to not separate the city and the county review of current planning (subdivisions and zoning).

- The city and the county now each have a department to focus on initiatives that are unique to each entity –
  - i. ie: rural initiatives
  - ii. the largest division within OPG (current planning) now has competent mid-management oversight
  - iii. the office is spending less time in non-productive meetings and more time in customer service
  - iv. we just completed a re-write of a portion of our subdivision regulations as encouraged by the review
  - v. we are recruiting for a new director and have a great pool of applicants
- We now get very few calls with complaints about how the office functions, which leads me to believe the efficiency and public service provided with professional staff has improved. The Office of Planning and Grants is a high volume office- the number of subdivision, zoning and grant projects continues to increase. All in all, I think they do a good job.

**9. Do you support legislation that would authorize local governments to enact a local option sales tax if approved by a vote?**

Jim Edwards

We need to be careful that this is not led by emotions. We need to look at the data, and alternatives that benefit the people living here. We as citizens may need more money but we sure do not need more taxes! I really believe we need property tax relief before we apply more taxes!

Jean Curtiss

Unless the state legislature finds a way to reform the state tax system, local government will continue to carry to burden of finding ways to meet the needs of the public. Therefore, I do support a voter approved, local option tax. It would give local government a way to fund projects or programs that the voters feel are important especially in the fast growing communities.