

# CITY COUNCIL VOTER GUIDE

The Independence Center solicited all 14 of the City Council candidates to ask them four questions about their views on issues that impact people with disabilities. Seven of the candidates responded and are listed first by the district they represent, then by their order on the ballot.

**11** Don Knight  
District 1

**3** Richard Skorman  
District 3

**4** Yolanda Avila  
District 4

**5** Lynette Crow-Iverson  
District 5

**5** Jill Gaebler  
District 5

**6** Melanie Bernhardt  
District 6

**6** Andy Pico  
District 6

Candidates who chose not to participate:

*Greg Basham – District 1*  
*David Geislinger – District 2*  
*Chuck Fowler- District 3*  
*Helen Collins – District 4*  
*Deborah Hendrix – District 4*  
*Robert Burns – District 6*  
*Janak Joshi – District 6*

**Read their responses below, and find more information about voter registration and election dates on the back of this voter guide from The Independence Center!**

## QUESTION

Are there barriers to people with disabilities in Colorado Springs?

**11** **Don Knight** - While we try to reduce barriers, of course barriers still remain. In my four years on Council, I became involved with constituents having issue with transit, both bus and our ADA Paratransit system; sidewalks, both accessibility and people shoveling the snow off; and affordable housing. How I have and will continue to address them is in my answers to the next three questions.





**Richard Skorman** - When I was on Council from 1999-2006, I actively supported handicap access ramps to be built throughout downtown and as new streets were built through the program called Complete Streets. And yes, it's a good thing that we are putting ramps on new roadways, but many of those like the Milton Proby Expressway aren't ever going to be used by pedestrians or people with Disabilities. In retrospect, I wish we had still set the money aside, but used that money in areas where they are needed. Many problems still exist on older streets and the conditions of sidewalks in our City are quite poor. I was hoping that more of the pothole tax (2C) and the Pikes Peak Rural Transit Authority (PPRTA) monies would go towards sidewalk repair and more ramps as well as potholes, new roads and new intersections. If I am elected, I will continue to advocate for more improvements today as I have in the past, but be more strategic about where the resources should be spent.



**Yolanda Avila** - Absolutely. As a partially sighted woman, I can personally speak to the challenges posed by sidewalks that are not walkable, inadequate transportation, and public buildings and housing that are not

accessible. The closest bus stop to my home is a mile away, and I cannot walk to it when it has snowed or rained. There is the option of Metro Mobility, however there are long wait times, if indeed the bus even shows up on time and one may find themselves on the bus for over an hour, just to go ten miles. God forbid if nature calls.



**Lynette Crow-Iverson** - Yes, and meeting the needs of the disabled population is not a luxury, it is a necessity. We need to ensure that all of our citizens are able to participate and contribute to our community, while also making Colorado Springs a more attractive destination for everyone.

People with disabilities are extremely varied – no one program fits all. We need to make sure people with disabilities have a seat at the table when determining the best programs and delivery of services, as they are most familiar with the services they need.

My message is simple: this is about leadership that empowers people, not government. We live in a city of growing opportunity, and the primary role of government is to ensure that opportunities are accessible and attainable for residents,



citizens and visitors alike. All new city projects need to include designs that are purposefully accessible to the disabled community. Our health as a city depends on ensuring that all members of the community can access the services they need. We need to break down barriers so those at-risk are as much a part of the city as everyone else. We need to broaden the understanding of the business community and citizens at large to understand the challenges as well as the value of the disabled community.

**5** **Jill Gaebler** - There are numerous barriers in Colorado Springs for people with disabilities. Most notably, although we have worked to enhance our transit system, the City has a long way to go toward providing a robust system that can adequately support community members who can't drive. I have made this issue a priority during my four years on City Council, encouraging other Council members to understand that transit is a necessary part of our transportation system and funding for transit should be on par with funding for our roads.

The City has also not implemented sufficient sidewalk infrastructure to accommodate those with special needs.

The City must focus on maintaining and improving the infrastructure it has before there is focus on spending to incentivize new development.

**6** **Melanie Bernhardt** - There are many barriers in this city. Sidewalks which don't have curb cuts, or if there is construction going on, no work around for a wheelchair. In some locations, a curb cut leads to stairs (really). In older parts of the city, driveways have to be used to get on and off the curb, but typically the driveway lip is too steep and can cause a wheelchair to tip over. Or in my case, the mid wheel is brought off the ground making the chair useless. Also disabled parking is really tough for vans with a ramp. (I'm going to go way over my limit if I keep going.)

**6** **Andy Pico** - Yes, there are barriers to people with disabilities. It will always be harder for those with disabilities but we can and should all work to reduce and eliminate such barriers. To a great extent many of the barriers have been reduced or eliminated to the extent practical but there will always be more to do.



# QUESTION

Does the Americans with Disabilities Act provide sufficient access for people with disabilities using City services?

As a Council member under our new form of Government, our job is to pass laws. Enforcement is up to the Executive Branch under the Mayor. However, some of the most rewarding times during my first term were when I could help constituents with enforcement by a simple phone call or e-mail to the right office under the Mayor. One example is I had a wheelchair enabled citizen reach out to me after being blocked from reaching her bus stop because an apartment complex was piling snow at the end of their side walk. Fortunately, our Mayor also recognized the shortfall and moved code enforcement from Police to Planning within his first week in office.



**Don Knight** - Yes and No. For Yes, the ADA requires whenever we

touch a road we need to bring all the adjacent sidewalks up to ADA standards. So 50% of the \$50M a year Issue 2C is bringing into our City for roads goes to concrete. In its first year (2016), Issue 2C paid for 269 new pedestrian ramps and retrofitted 466 others ramps. This is over and above the 134 new pedestrian ramps and 130 retro fitted ramps with other tax dollars.

On the no side, there is nothing in the Americans for Disabilities Act that says people have to shovel their sidewalks 24-hours after a snow storm. That is required by City Law. Unfortunately, we do not do a decent job of enforcing that law.



**Richard Skorman** - Again, I know that we have come a long way when it comes to new streets and City Bus service but there are still many more challenges ahead. ADA is a life saver (literally) as we would probably not comply with those standards on our own in City facilities and require them in new commercial and multi-family residential buildings. But again, it's the old infrastructure that has been grandfathered through that needs the most attention.



**4** **Yolanda Avila** - Only when the Act is enforced, which has not been the case in many areas of our City. For example, the bridge on Airport road in front of Firestation 8 is not accessible to persons in wheelchairs, or when it has rained or snowed. I have seen people in wheelchairs have to travel on the street itself, and it is an incredibly busy street. This is only one example of what is happening throughout the City. Crumbling infrastructure combined with the lack of ADA compliance poses a very real threat to the bodily safety.

**5** **Lynette Crow-Iverson** - It does, but we can always do better. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. Title II of the ADA prohibits disability discrimination by all public entities at the local level; which applies to public transportation provided by public entities.

Accessible sidewalks and paths as well as easily accessible public transit systems not only meet the needs of the disabled

population, it helps keep all of our citizens active, including seniors. This should be a consideration during the development of any project as it is more expensive to retrofit a building or sidewalk for disabled access. It is fiscally efficient and effective for a city to include, than not!

I want residents of all ages to stay, grow their families and retire in Colorado Springs. Pride for our City must be elevated, and is directly linked to the quality of opportunities found within our city.

We need our elected officials and City Staff to communicate more effectively to the disabled community regarding programs, services and basic information available to the them.

**5** **Jill Gaebler** - I believe the City is trying to provide sufficient access for people with disabilities, and I see examples of these improvements throughout my council district, whether it's upgrades to sidewalks, the addition of technology in City Hall for the hear-impaired, or parking lot improvements. But there is always a need for improvement as funds allow.



**6) Melanie Bernhardt** - I feel the city try. There are many doors where the pull pounds are too great and the door cannot be pulled open. Or the incline to a doorway has a steep threshold (over the 11%) making it near impossible to navigate a chair through a door. However, I'm please with many things too. Good service dog access, newer buildings have nice wide doors, good restrooms, and I'm starting to see rails on ramps. Excellent.

**6) Andy Pico** - I believe it does. Access to all city buildings has been improved to comply with the ADA and sidewalks have or are being improved. There remains some work to be done and enforcement of the ADA is a responsibility that we must meet.

## QUESTION

Are current transportation options and infrastructure sufficient to meet the needs of people with disabilities in the region?

**11) Don Knight** - No. Our bus system needs are two-fold: expanded service areas and more frequent service in existing areas. Both of these require more funding. The Mayor's and Council's restoration of the maintenance of effort funding will allow improvement to one but not both. Additionally, the possibility for future substantial increase funding is bleak given all the other priorities fighting for limited City dollars. Before my November 2014 Rolling Town Hall on various bus routes within District 1, I favored adding more routes. However, after talking to the people who use and count on transit; more frequent service is needed first.

Especially for people with Disabilities. During my first campaign, I heard during an Independence meeting a story of wheelchair enabled citizen having to wait an hour for the next bus because the wheelchair slot in the first bus was occupied. That taught me two major lessons. One, if we ever go down to smaller busses, we need to keep a minimum of two wheelchair slots. Two, not all our bus stops have shelters to protect someone from the elements who has to wait an hour for the next bus.

More frequent service also helps passengers using ADA Paratransit (Metro Mobility)



system providing rides for people with disabilities within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of a bus route – on the same days and hours that particular bus route operates. In my first term, I had a constituent denied a Metro Mobility ride because the bus did not go where he needed on Sundays.

**3 Richard Skorman** - I wish we had the concentration of population to support a vibrant and convenient public transportation system. Unfortunately we have built our City out, not up, with few pedestrian amenities. So even if you could take a bus in a decent amount of time to Constitution and Powers, you are taking your life in your hands as a pedestrian when you get out. When I was on Council, Springs Mobility was effective as a means of transportation for the Disability Community but I understand that some of those services have been cut back. I am a fan of the Jitney Van system that they have in Portland that takes riders door to door. It's sort of like Uber times 5 at a 5th of the cost. If elected, I will lobby at the State to allow that to happen in Colorado Springs. It's the only hope we have to have a convenient and affordable public transportation system in City as large, as sparsely populated and as poor planned for pedestrians as ours.

**4 Yolanda Avila** - No. Although there have been slow and incremental improvements in bus service and the paratransit that is available, people with disabilities still struggle to access all the resources and opportunities they need and are often excluded and isolated because of inadequate transportation access. We absolutely have to invest in more bus routes, more frequency, and more transfer points. This is particularly true in the Southeast, where some of the routes have been cut or changed, leaving many neighborhoods disconnected and riders stranded. It is also critical that we invest in safe and accessible sidewalks. So many areas of the City have no sidewalks, or no curb cuts. Even when there are curb cuts and ramps, they are frequently filled with so much sand and dirt that weeds are growing in them. I have seen wheelchairs stuck and even toppled over because of too much sand and debris on the sidewalk. We need to support public transit, build more sidewalks, and maintain the ones we already have.

**5 Lynette Crow-Iverson** - I want to make Colorado Springs one of the “Most Livable Cities” with a world-class transit and a multi-modal system that drives economic growth, sustainable



development and accessibility for all. We need to improve accessibility, routes and affordability for mass transit and transit oriented development that can benefit the disabled population. Low density patterns and limited resources are a challenge for public transportation in Colorado Springs. Over half of the city's residents (56%) live outside existing transit service area making transit access to Downtown a challenge. Intra-city mobility must provide frequent service with an emphasis on transit corridors that connect all riders with multiple destination options and must enhance transit options with first- and last-mile connections. We should redesign bus operations to provide multiple stops throughout the city center, rather than at one fixed transit center, while focusing on routes that have the strongest ridership and have the best chance of attracting new riders. A comprehensive study is in progress to identify a location for a modern new multi-modal transportation facility in or near the core (e.g., the new and relocated Downtown Transit Center).

We need to encourage that all new private revitalization projects consider place-based development in their plans and make walkability a priority; which will strategically direct city resources

to maximize our existing infrastructure through innovation and efficiency.

⑤ **Jill Gaebler** - No. I have addressed this issue in my first response, and will continue to fight for a more robust transit system.

⑥ **Melanie Bernhardt** - No. For a person with a disability, there are too few bus stops and too far from neighborhoods. I live in district 6 and need to walk to another district if I ever want to take public transportation. You can call for a lift bus, but that is not practical if you need to do something spontaneously. I drive, but I needed to take a bus once when I dropped my car off for repair. I ended up staying with the car all day. There was no way to return home.

⑥ **Andy Pico** - I believe that in large measure there are options available both through Mountain Metro as well as some of the other non-profit agencies. On the buses, there are special ramps installed to enable wheel chair access and the decks and seats are configured for ease of access.



# QUESTION

What is the role of the City in the provision of affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities?



**Don Knight** - Under our current form of Government, Council's role in providing affordable and accessible housing is minor. The City's lead, Ms Amy Cox, works for the Mayor. Council does support her by approving her budget and her annual action plan. One example is we approved providing the Springs Rescue Mission with excess Community Development Block Grant funds so they can support homeless singles while the Marion House concentrates on families.

I also support Ms Cox's assessment that low income housing is defined as 30% of one's disability check; not just cheaper than the place next door. A few months ago, I had the pleasure of being a panel member at the 10th Annual Legislative Town Hall

Intellectual and Development Disabilities. We heard several stories on the need for affordable housing, defined as rent less than their disability check. A couple of weeks later, we had a developer requesting Council approval to build affordable housing apartments. His definition though was approximately \$1,200 a-month rent for a one-bed room apartment. Before being on the panel, I would have believed him.



**Richard Skorman** - Affordable housing is getting a bigger problem now than when I was on Council over a decade ago. And it will only get worse unless we make it a priority. As a City Council, we need to remove as many barriers as possible to allow the market to build affordable housing, particularly in parts of the city that can support public transportation. One of those drivers would be to provide incentives by removing unnecessary building codes that currently exist in to make it easier to build infill development. I also like what they have done in many other cities where City's provide incentives to create affordable housing zones through landbanking of vacant lots and buildings. Those properties that aren't currently producing revenue are essentially donated for a period of time so that affordable



units could be built less expensively. If Council as Utility Board also had the will, utilities infrastructure could be built at a significantly reduce price. The hope is that these vacant properties and buidings might as well be donated and up front for free and then be paid for on the back end when they are put to use as affordable housing. I do worry that much of the Federal Funding that is currently in place to assist with these projects will be cut by the current administration in the Washington.

 **Yolanda Avila** - The City must encourage the development of affordable housing however it can, and require a certain number of all affordable units to be accessible to the elderly or people with disabilities. We need to make sure that an adequate number of units are accessible, to start fulfilling the growing demand of people with disabilities. Whenever building more affordable, accessible housing we also need to make sure that it is connected to transit routes and close to essential services. We should encourage the development of such housing in various neighborhoods scattered throughout the whole City, so that people do not find themselves isolated or labeled by their address. Although progress has been made, we still

have a lot of work to do to make sure that people of all abilities are supported in our City. I am personally invested and I will work relentlessly for rapid, convenient transportation, plentiful housing options, and make sure that people in Colorado Springs are getting the full benefit of ADA rules.

 **Lynette Crow-Iverson** - Colorado Springs still faces a disparity in affordability and the cost of housing. Current efforts have not produced enough affordable housing units and discourages density and mixed-use development. Thin margins on new construction make this issue particularly challenging.

We need deep supportive partnerships and resources throughout the community. Private-public partnerships are a necessary mechanism in this space. The solution involves a multi-pronged effort involving a collaborative effort involving all facets of our community. We must continue to invest in organizations with innovative and proven programs that address physical and mental health issues for the most at-risk in our community. A regional plan to affordable housing is a great first step. We must ensure that we are garnering feedback from the stakeholders and organizations involved.



Outcome-based ideas, not personalities or politics, will be the priority.

Smart land use decisions are key drivers to a city's revitalization. A continued emphasis on and promotion of greater density, mixed-use buildings, and housing opportunities will enhance Colorado Springs' ability to attract and retain a critical mass of residents that support a range of amenities.

We are "Better Together," and therefore need to strengthen the partnerships throughout the community and the other entities that serve our city to achieve our collective vision and goals.

**5** **Jill Gaebler** - I do not believe it is the City's role to ensure there is adequate housing available for any specific group, but I do believe it's our role to reduce barriers to the development of multi-family and affordable housing, and to provide tax credits and other incentives to promote this type of development. I have worked on these issues during my first term on City Council, leading a committee that made recommendations toward increasing infill development that adds density, promotes multi-modal transportation, increasing connectivity that allows people greater access in their neighborhoods, and to the places they need to get to, like the

supermarket. I will continue to focus my efforts on these issues in my second term.

**6** **Melanie Bernhardt** - The city needs to help those with disabilities and housing by protecting apartments or homes that are accessible. More often than not, accessible places are rented to those who do not need them. Perhaps some kind of fine can be put in place? I am not sure, but if public funding is used, then accessible homes should be held open for those needing it.

**6** **Andy Pico** - The city should encourage and enable affordable housing but provision is the responsibility of private industry. By encouraging and enabling a strong economy and increasing supply of housing, the housing will be more affordable. The city also has the responsibility of enforcing the ADA and ensuring fair housing and access.



# VOTE AT THE CITY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

30 S. Nevada Suite 101  
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

MARCH 10- APRIL 4

For other polling locations visit,  
[coloradosprings.gov/election](http://coloradosprings.gov/election)

## ELECTION DAY Tuesday, April 4th

All ballots must be received by 7pm on election day. The Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) is available Monday through Friday 8:00am-5:00pm between March 10, 2017 and April 4, 2017 at the City Administration Building. April 4, 2017 the Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) will be available from 7:00am-7:00pm. Please contact the City Clerk's Office with any questions at Phone: (719) 385-5901 (option 4)

Email: [election@springsgov.com](mailto:election@springsgov.com)  
Fax: 719-385-5114.

**VOTE**  
BY APRIL 4

To register or update your registration, visit [govotecolorado.com](http://govotecolorado.com)

To contact the County Clerk, call 719-385-5901 (option 4)

## Important Information about the City's first Accessible Voting Mechanisms!

For persons requiring assistance voting, the City Clerk's Office is equipped with an Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM), designed for persons with disabilities. This voting equipment is not a polling place, and is not intended for in-person voting for persons without a disability. The Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) is primarily designed with an audio component and handheld keypad for persons with visual impairment. The Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) also includes an option for other interface devices such as a Sip-n-Puff and Rocker Paddle. We request you provide your own interface device. Please note we are able to provide headphones only. The Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) is wheelchair accessible.

If possible, please bring your mail ballot with you at the time you desire to use the Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM). This is helpful, but not required. The Accessible Voting Mechanism (AVM) does not do ballot tabulation; it creates a paper ballot, and the ballot will be placed in a secrecy sleeve and sealed in an envelope which will require signature.



The Independence Center is a local non-profit organization that provides home health care, independent living, and advocacy services for people with disabilities. These programs are complimented by advocacy and transition assistance, peer support, skills classes, and numerous other services. The IC's goal is to empower and provide the resources needed to people with disabilities so they can live independent lives.

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719-471-8181 | Video Phone for the Deaf 719-358-2513

