

**CFF Candidate Questionnaire
Mayor and City Council Candidates
November 2019 Election
(4-year Term)**

Name: Kat Bruner James

Address: 263 Vester, Ferndale

Phone and/or email: 248-629-0309; katbrunerjames@gmail.com

Please provide responses to the following prompts:

- **Describe your community involvement.**

I have lived in Ferndale for 17 years. Almost immediately, I became involved in City government as well as the City's many non-profit and community organizations. I've attended more City Council meetings and community events than I could possibly count. I have listed below some of the highlights of my experience:

- Ferndale for Instant Runoff Voting, 2003-2004
- Citizens for a Fair Ferndale (CFF) Board of Directors, 2005-present
 - CFF Chair, 2008-present
- Citizen of the Year, 2015
- City Clerk's Election Task Force, 2015-2016
- Master Land Use Plan Public Steering Committee, 2015-2017
- Diversity Champion Honor Roll by Race Relations & Diversity Task Force, 2016
- Ferndale Police Open Data Task Force, 2017
- Ferndale Inclusion Network Planning Committee, 2017-present
- Baker Project Study Committee, 2019
- Civil Service Board, 2019-present

- **Why did you decide to run for City Council? What has prepared you to hold a City Council seat?**

This is something I have wanted to do for many years, and I put a lot of thought into the timing. I know that effective public service requires an enormous amount of time and effort. I appreciate the investment that others have put forth to ensure that the City provides high-quality services, maintains a balanced budget, and contributes to cultivating our unique sense of community. I decided many years ago that Ferndale is my forever home and that has compelled me to offer my own experience and talents to keep us moving forward. We are also at a pivotal moment where development, shifting demographics, and increased housing costs are creating tangible discomfort. This is my opportunity to serve the community that I love and ensure that all voices are heard as we make important decisions about our future.

Both my professional and personal experience have prepared me for a seat on City Council. I have been an attorney for 12 years and my legal training has prepared me to interpret our existing codes and policies and anticipate the potential consequences of our decisions in the future. My legal practice specializes in civil rights litigation – I mostly represent people who have been abused by police, other government officials, or corporations. This gives me the unique ability be vigilant about the decisions that we make and their impact on vulnerable members of our community.

My personal experience – especially my community involvement as listed in answer to the first question – has prepared me to understand how our City government already functions, including the areas that need some improvement. I have served on several committees for the City, so I understand the role of our employees and have established positive working relationships with many of them. I have served on three non-profit boards, one of which supervised employees, so I understand the role of board governance in our municipal structure. I am the only candidate who offers the unique skillset of having direct experience with City functions while coming from a completely volunteer resident perspective.

- **What is the most productive relationship between Council and the City Manager?**

In a Council-Manager form of government, like ours in Ferndale, City Council determines policy, including approving the budget, passing ordinances and resolutions, making certain appointments. The City Manager advises Council on their policy decisions, implements policy, oversees day-to-day operations of the City,

They key to a successful relationship between Council and the City Manager is communication – clear expectations, thorough explanations, and productive feedback. Council relies on the City Manager’s education and experience to provide data and recommendations and implement policy. Whereas the City Manager relies on Council to make themselves knowledgeable about the City Charter, codes, and existing policies. Council and City staff in general must collaborate and work as a team in order to efficiently and equitably serve residents.

- **When there is disagreement on any issue among members of the City Council what is the responsibility of each individual Council member?**

Relationships among council members must be productive, even if fundamental disagreements arise. Each council member is obligated to listen to the concerns of others – *really* listen (not just stop talking and think about how to respond). Try to understand their perspective. Ask questions. Consider a course of action (amendments or adjustments) that could resolve the disagreement. Try to let go of disagreements in the past and take up new issues with fresh eyes and no baggage. The CFF Good Neighbors Pledge (http://fairferndale.org/?page_id=2), which Council adopted several years ago, is a good tool to reflect on when such disagreement arises.

- **What role do Boards and Commissions play in Ferndale's Government? How should members be recruited/screened?**

Boards and Commissions are an important mechanism by which to garner resident (and business, where applicable) input, to provide citizen oversight of governmental functions, and utilize local expertise. These Boards and Commissions are key to informing the Council about issues prior to deciding an issue. Ferndale seems to have a particularly qualified pool of residents from which to draw volunteers. For example, our Planning Commission includes members who have relevant education and/or training.

Recruitment can be accomplished in at least two ways, which should not be mutually exclusive. One is that council members and staff recommend potential board members who they recognize as having a skillset and/or desire to serve. The second way is to distribute announcements of vacancies with a very brief description of the attributes needed and the expectations (i.e., a job description). This information is often posted on the City's website and available for those who seek it, but it should also be distributed on a regular basis (monthly or quarterly, depending on the need) both electronically and in print (posted in City buildings and the Library, press release to local media, and other reasonable print options). The mechanics of a screening process may vary, depending on the particularities of each entity. For boards and commissions that are established by our charter must comply with nomination and selection process established therein. When reasonable, existing board/commission members (or their designee subcommittees) and department heads who work with the relevant board/commission should have an opportunity to review applications, interview candidates, and provide input to Council in the appointment process.

- **How will you work to promote inclusion of populations that might feel excluded in this community?**

I'm not sure whether the question is examining how residents may feel excluded from engaging with the City government or whether it is addressing how to foster a culture of inclusion in the community overall (not limited to City operations). I will touch on both.

City Council meetings can be an excellent way to stay informed about issues and interact with City leadership, but the time is limited, the environment can be intimidating, and it's simply not an option for everyone. If elected to Council, I will take steps to increase opportunities for residents to have face-to-face conversations with elected officials and, when feasible, City staff. I will volunteer myself and encourage others on Council to, as much as possible, attend some meetings that are already happening in the community (neighborhood groups, non-profits, civic or cultural organizations, etc.) and organize new opportunities to engage (coffee chats, park picnics, etc.) where meaningful relationships can be promoted.

For the larger community, the City can help lead the community in promoting inclusive values that will extend beyond public institutions. In its Strategic Plan, the City sets forth a Vision, Mission, Guiding Principles, and Values, all of which embrace diversity, inclusion

and/or equity. However, those statements are not easily accessible to the public, if they even know to look for them. Whether elected to Council or not, I will encourage the City to include these statements on more of its written documents and digital presence, which helps communicate to residents, businesses, and guests that these values are important to our community. I will also continue my work with Ferndale Inclusion Network to raise the racial consciousness in Ferndale through workshops, community discussions, and other programs that promote inclusion.

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

Ultimately, Ferndale will benefit from development that is consistent with our Strategic Plan and Master Plan. For example, we have already identified affordable housing, senior housing at different income levels, and increased downtown housing as part of our Master Plan. We have also prioritized sustainable design and green stormwater infrastructure (providing spaces to rainfall naturally, such as landscaping or permeable surfaces, as opposed to moving it around through gutters) in public developments. To the extent that we can attract or incentivize development in line with these goals and priorities, Ferndale will benefit.

- **What specific ideas do you have for reducing expenditures while maintaining city services?**

While increasing revenues (without increasing the tax rate) would help maintain or expand city services, the question asks only about reducing expenditures, so my answer will focus on that. My first recommendation would be to request that each department head seek input from department staff regarding suggestions for cutting costs and reducing inefficiencies. That may sound overly simplistic or naïve, but this has been proven to result in cost savings in several examples. Schnurer, Eric (7/2/13). *The Secret to Cutting Government Waste: Saving By a Thousand Cuts*. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from www.theatlantic.com. We should also consider cost savings that also achieve other goals, like environmental sustainability. For example, landscaping in our public space should focus on drought-resistant and native plant species. This would reduce cost in replacing short-lived annuals and reduce the need for constant watering.

- **Describe one program you would champion to help foster community.**

As mentioned above, I seek to increase opportunities for residents to engage with City leadership. I have had hundreds of conversations with residents as I have knocked on doors during this campaign. Through our discussions, many have said that they would like to have more of these conversations throughout the year – not just during campaign season. It would be so much easier to interact with residents through neighborhood organizations. It would provide opportunities for City leaders to visit various neighborhoods and interact with residents on their own turf. Ferndale has a few already (Woodland Park Improvement Assoc., The Dales, Vester Street Neighbors, etc.) with varying

levels of activity, organization, and size. The City's Strategic Plan and Master Plan sets a goal of supporting the organization of such groups. I hope to see achieve this goal by meeting with identified leaders of some of the existing groups to gather "best practices" or suggestions on how residents can start one in their own neighborhood. I would encourage residents who are more experienced in these groups to mentor those who are just beginning. Throughout the process, City leaders could (on a voluntary rotating basis) attend neighborhood groups to provide updates on City topics and hear residents' questions or concerns.

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

I see Ferndale looking and feeling very similar to how it looks today, with a few exciting changes. Ranked choice voting has been implemented and used twice (in 2021 and 2023) in City elections and growing statewide. Residents will have new and varied opportunities to engage with the City, through neighborhood organizations and other programs. A renovated and enhanced Kulick Center provides a variety of programming and meeting space for residents. The dot has brought new businesses and residents downtown, including more daytime visitors in our downtown district. New businesses are thriving alongside our industrial businesses. Our community has weathered any potential economic shift through expansion of tax revenues from redeveloped properties and through efficient and sustainable cost reductions.